DARK WINGS - - - - - - WILLIAM BYRON MOWERY

Short Stories

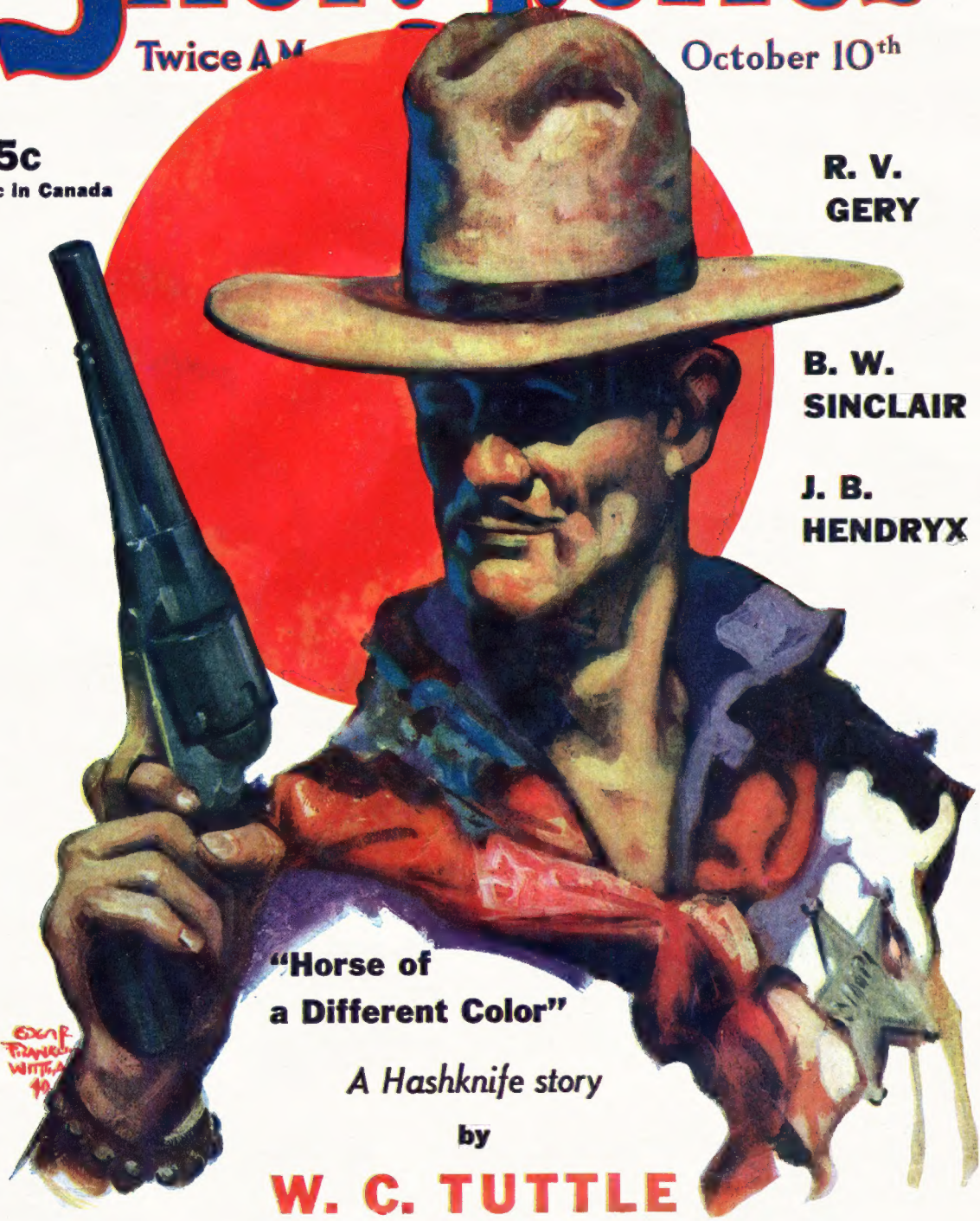
Twice A M — October 10th

25c
30c in Canada

R. V. GERY

B. W. SINCLAIR

J. B. HENDRYX



"Horse of a Different Color"

A Hashknife story

by

W. C. TUTTLE

"AND TO THINK . . .

I might have lost you!"

"I DON'T KNOW *how I could ever have been such a fool, Betsy . . such a careless, unthinking idiot . . .*"

"*Don't say that, darling. It was partly my fault, too. I should have told you . . . said something. But it's such an embarrassing subject to talk about—a person's breath! I didn't know how to tell you.*"

"*It'll never happen again, dearest. I've learned my lesson—plenty. Thank heaven Bill saw the way things were going with us. And did he give me the devil about it, too! . . . Told me point-blank what the trouble was, and asked me how I expected any girl to stay in love with a man who constantly offended that way.**"

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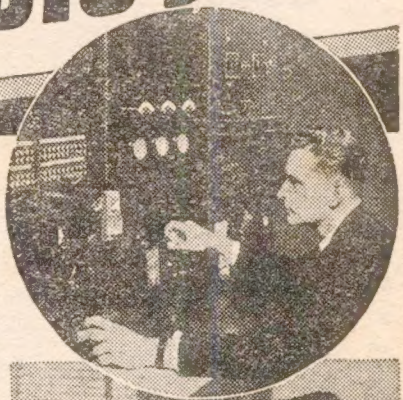

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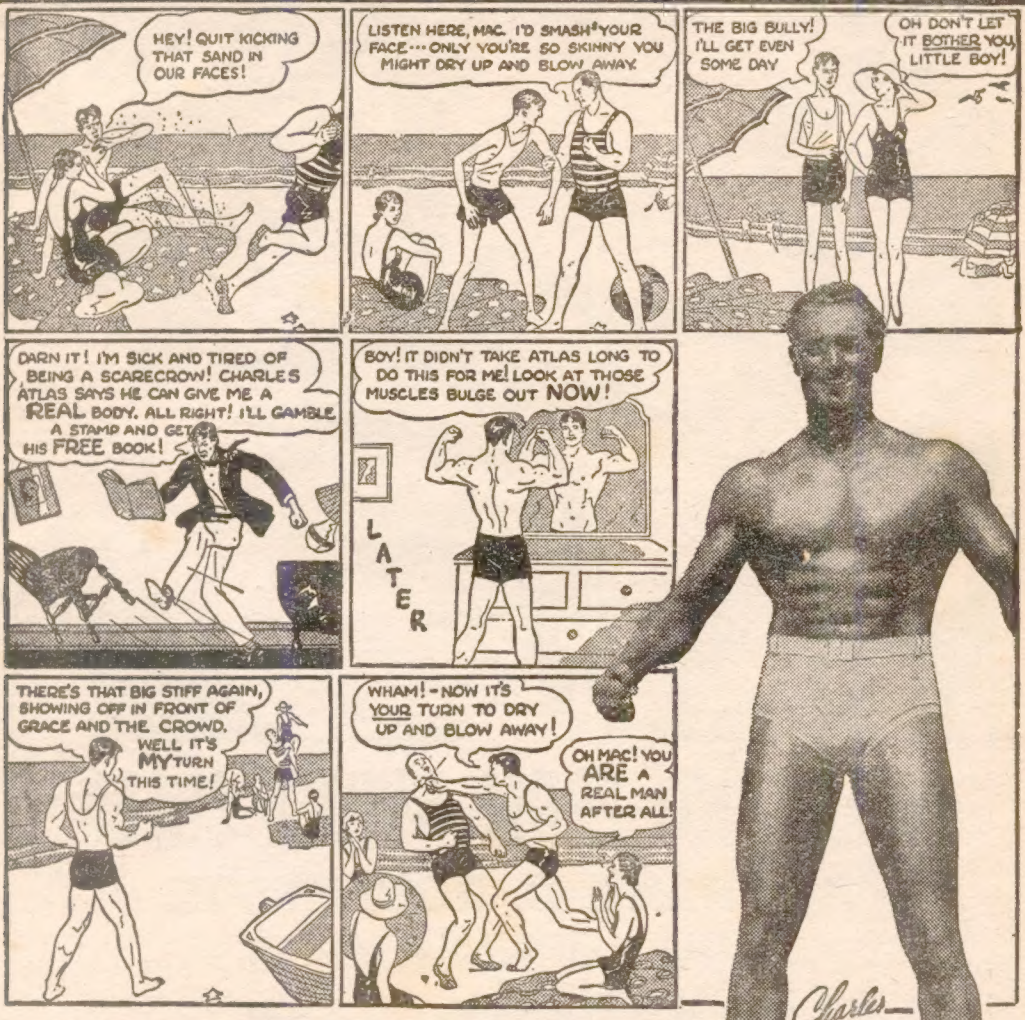
HEY! QUIT KICKING THAT SAND IN OUR FACES!
LISTEN HERE, MAC. I'D SMASH YOUR FACE··· ONLY YOU'RE SO SKINNY YOU MIGHT DRY UP AND BLOW AWAY.
THE BIG BULLY! I'LL GET EVEN SOME DAY
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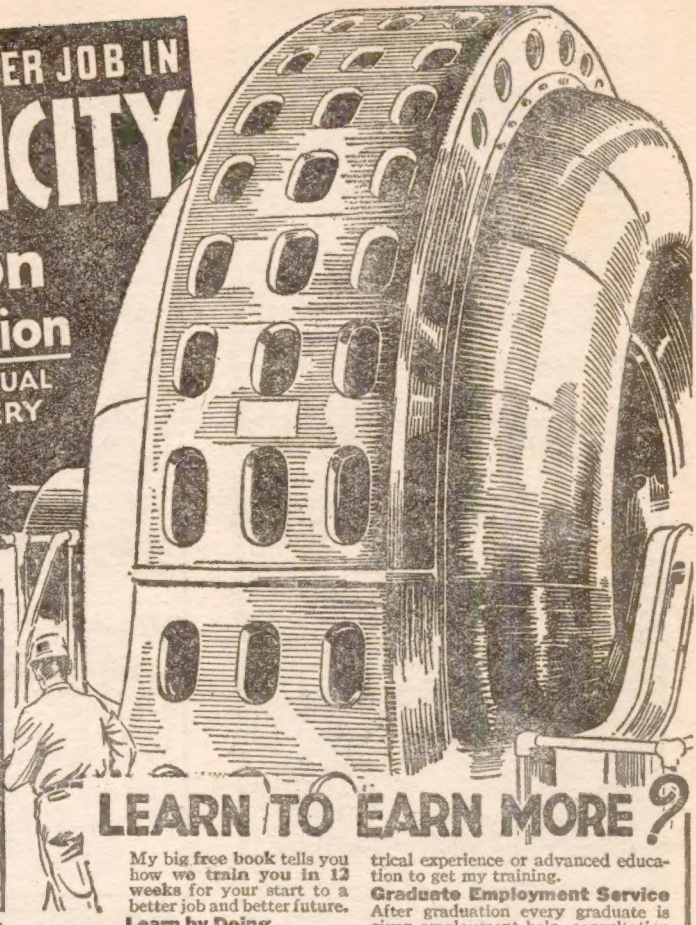

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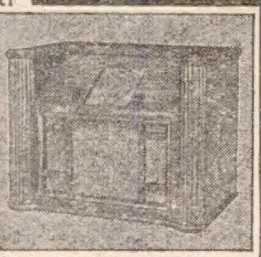

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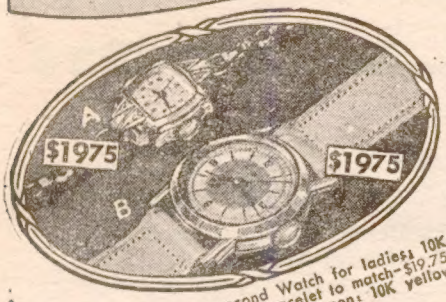

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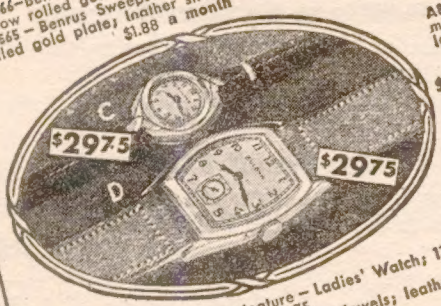

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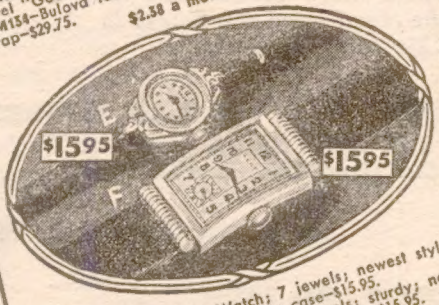

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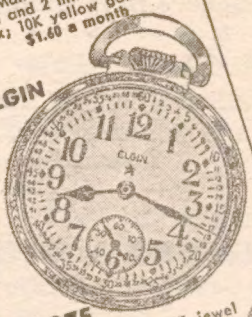

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T. RAYMOND FOLEY, *President*, WILLIAM J. DELANEY, *Secretary and Treasurer*. D. McILWRAITH, *Editor*.

BIGGEST AND BEST—TWICE A MONTH

Stories

latest stories—no reprints

OCTOBER 10th, 1940

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COVER—Edgar F. Wittmack

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HORSE OF A

A Hashknife Hartley Story

THE bunkhouse at the Flying H was heavy with smoke, mingled with kerosene odors and the smell of saddle leather. A dozen cowboys were in there, some stretched out on bunks, talking and arguing, while five of them humped around a card-table, whiling away the evening at draw poker.

Shorty Breen studied Hashknife Hartley's raise of two-bits, rubbed his stubbled chin and finally discarded his hand.

"You stood pat, Shorty," reminded Hashknife, "and I drew three."

"Aw, I know." Shorty rubbed his right ear violently with one hand, while he shoved the deck over to Amos Slaughter with the other.

"It's the way yuh look at me," complained Shorty. "I try to look unconcerned, like a feller with a pat hand, and all the time yo're lookin' at me, sayin' to yourself, 'That sucker ain't got more'n two deuces'."

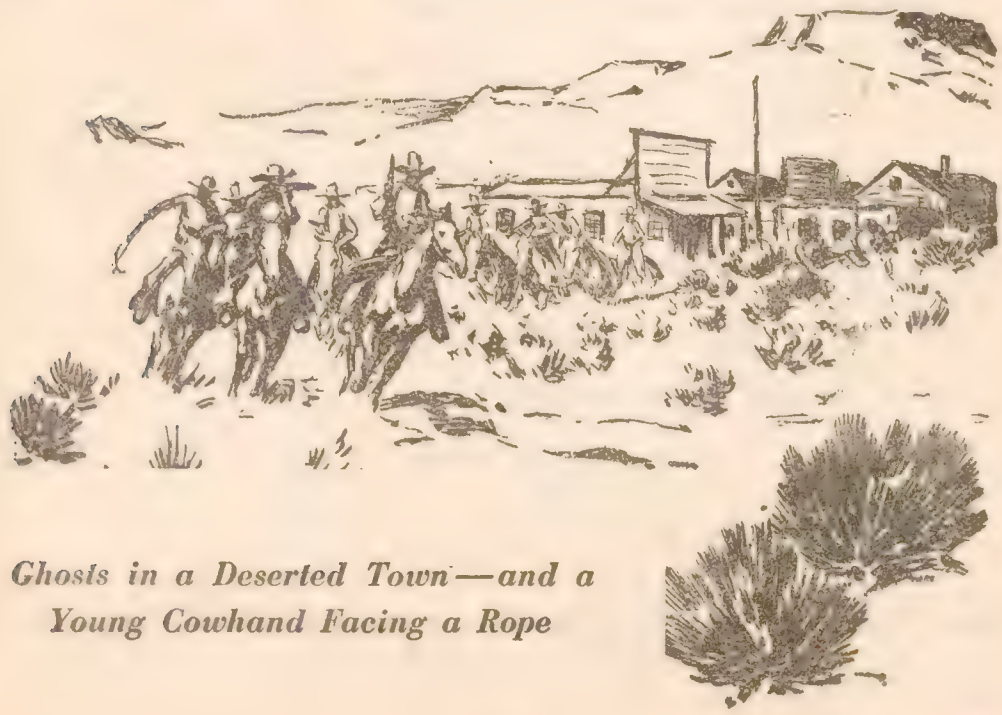
Hashknife laughed quietly, as he tossed some chips to the table.

"Knowin' that you've only got two deuces," corrected Nick Cole.

"I didn't know what he had," said Hashknife. "He wasn't able to swaller, if that was any give-away. I'll open for two-bits on three jacks and a pair of tens."

The other four players flipped their chips to the center. Hashknife stood pat, while others drew from one to three cards each.

"Three jacks and a pair of tens, eh?" smiled Shorty. "You'll need 'em before I get through." Hashknife had three jacks and a pair of tens, and Shorty lost two dollars and seventy-five cents, backing three deuces and a pair of fives.



Ghosts in a Deserted Town—and a Young Cowhand Facing a Rope

DIFFERENT COLOR

By W. C. TUTTLE

"I hope t' die!" wailed Shorty. "He reads what's in my hands, and tells me what's in his. Hartley, you ain't got no business playin' bunk-house poker. If I was you, I'd be in Galena City, where they play for real money. Yo're wastin' yore time, cowboy."

"How's the games down there, Gib?" asked Amos Slaughter.

Tom Gibson, recently from the Ghost Town range, laid a year-old magazine aside and reached for the makings of a cigarette.

"Yuh never seen anythin' like it," he declared loudly. "Why, I've seen one bet of—"

"Now you've gone and done it!" interrupted Hank Nevins, foreman of the Flying H. "You've done given Gib the chance he's been a-layin' for ever since he came back here. All right, Gib, don't look hurt. You and everybody else knows that yo're the biggest liar that ever went unbathed all summer."

"What summer yuh talkin' about?" asked Gib blandly.

"All yore life."

"'Course, if yuh don't want to hear it, what'd he ask for?" complained Gib. "If a feller asks how is the games down there, what am I supposed to do — go deef, Hank?"

"Go ahead," urged Sleepy Stevens. "If there's anythin' I like to hear, it's a liar, lyin' about gamblin'."

"What was this I heard about Old Bob Tygard, the New Mexico outlaw, gettin' away from a deputy sheriff on the train?" asked Shorty.

"Who is Bob Tygard?" queried Nick Cole. "You speak like he was the only outlaw they ever had in New Mexico, Shorty."

"Since you left there," nodded Shorty soberly.

"OLD BOB was a *mucho malo hombre,* if yuh ask me," said Hank. "Him and another feller stuck up stages, banks and trains, gathering plenty money, until the law nabbed Old Bob and filed him away for years. But they made him a trusty, and Old Bob got away, they tell me."

"That's the story," nodded Shorty.

"Yeah, that's the way I heard it," said Gib. "Yuh see, they caught Old Bob in Los Angeles. He's a harmless sort of an old dude, so they turned him over to a deputy sheriff to bring back to the pen. Jist a few miles out of Silver Butte, the deputy unshackled one of Bob's wrists, so Bob can shuck off his clothes, and Bob socked him over the head with the loose cuff.

"They're in one of them there drawin'-rooms on the train; so Old Bob locked the door, kicked out the wash-room winder and dismounted, with that train makin' fifty miles an hour. They stopped in Silver Butte and got a posse together right away, but they can't find Old Bob. Me, I think he hit the ground so hard that he went plumb out of sight."

"Never found him, eh?" queried Hashknife.

"Ain't yet," replied Gib.

"What sort of a country is that Ghost Town range?" asked Hashknife.

"Pretty much like this, except it's in a valley," replied Gib. "Yuh see, Galena City was jist a common cow-town, until they struck gold down there. Yuh never seen a town grow so fast in yore life. Why, I—"

"Who the hell started this anyway?" interrupted Hank.

"It growed fast—but what of it?" queried Sleepy Stevens.

"And why did you leave?" added Shorty.

"Ghosts," replied Gib soberly.

"Now, you've got a listen comin' to yuh, Shorty," said Hank. "We might as well bust up this unprofitable poker game. Anyway, Hashknife's got all the chips. Here's the two dollars and four-bits in the treasury, Tall Feller. You've prob'ly been cheated, but that's all there is."

"Anyway, I didn't lose anythin'," smiled Hashknife, as he accepted the money. "But what about the ghosts, Gib?"

"Three of 'em," replied Gib soberly, "a-settin' on the porch of the Gilt Edge Hotel, all dressed in white, flowin' garments. Yuh could see 'em there in the moonlight, jist as plain as anythin'."

"In Galena City?" asked Sleepy.

"Hell, no—in Ghost Town."

"You was drunk," declared Hank.

"Well, I wasn't drunk when I quit runnin'," said Gib. "Hell, I never even waited to take my horse along."

"What's this Ghost Town like?" asked Hashknife curiously.

SLEEPY groaned aloud, and Hank said, "What's the matter—bellyache?"

"Well, she's jist a ghost town," said Gib. "Nobody lives there."

"Except ghosts," said Shorty.

"Ghosts don't live," said Nick Cole. "I 'member oncet when—"

"Keep it until later," interrupted Hashknife. "Let Gib tell his."

"This place," continued Gib, "is about eight miles from Galena City, and she's about three miles off the road from Silver Butte to Galena City. Big silver strike in there, long time ago. Must have been quite

a place. Then the silver played out, and they moved right away, leavin' mostly everythin' like it was. Main Street's all weeds and brush, but yuh can still read some of the signs. Card tables and a bar in one of the saloons.

"One puncher down there, kinda goofy jasper, swears that the old-timers come back some nights and play poker, and kinda raise hell around the old place. Me, I don't care if they do—I ain't spyin'."

"But you saw three ghosts," reminded Hashknife.

"That's right," agreed Gib quickly. "I got full of whiskey down in Galena and I made a bet with a feller that I'd stay all night in the old town. Bet him ten dollars."

"And lost it," added Shorty.

"Yo're damn tootin' I lost it. Lost a quart of whiskey, lost my horse and saddle and my gun. Got the horse and saddle back, though. I jist rode up there in the moonlight, tied my bronc at a rotten old hitchrack, took me a good slug of whiskey from that bottle, and said, 'Ghosts, c'mon and have a drink!' Jist like that."

"You hadn't ort to ever issue an invitation to a ghost, Gib," said Nick.

"Mebbe I was plumb ignorant," said Gib soberly, "'cause there they was, all three of 'em, a-settin' in front of the old Gilt Edge, all dressed in white. Now don't tell me they wasn't there. I seen 'em!"

"What'd you do, Gib?" asked Hank.

"I jist *went*, that's all. 'Bout a half mile from there I caught up with a cougar on a narrer trail, chasin' a jackrabbit. That fool cougar wouldn't turn off the trail, so I jist leaped him and kept goin'. Fifty yards further on I made a one-handed pick-up of that rabbit, flung him back at that cougar, and kept on. And I ain't lyin,' when I tell yuh I caught up with and passed three coyotes and one lobo wolf between there and Galena City."

"Didja ever pay that ten dollar bet, Gib?" asked Shorty.

"Well," replied Gib soberly, "a feller with my speed don't need to worry about his creditors."

"Any excitement down there?" asked Hashknife, leaning back from the table and rolling a cigarette with his long, muscular fingers.

"Oh, shore. There was an old hermit down there. Hermit Bill, they called him. Wore a long white beard and long white hair. Owned a section of land and a few head of dogies back in the hills. There's a young cow-waddie down there, who owns a little spread near the hermit's place. His name's Steve McLeod.

"It seems that Steve and the hermit had some trouble over some water, and then the hermit had Steve arrested for stealin' a calf. The law exonerated Steve, who said he was goin' to get even with the old man. Next night the old man was killed in his shack, and the place burned. They got what was left out of the fire, and the doctor cut a forty-five bullet out of the skull. They've got Steve in jail, facin' a murder charge. Right nice kid, too, Steve is.

"The funny part is that the hermit is supposed to have money. He left a will, I heard, leavin' everythin' he owned to a niece.

"But the lawyer who had the will says there ain't no sign of the money. They shore searched the remains of that shack and the other buildin's, but they can't find a thing. The lawyer says the will reads that the hermit had plenty of money, but he didn't say where he kept it. It ain't in no bank. Mebbe it was in paper money and all burned up—I dunno."

"Will they hang Steve on that evidence?" asked Hashknife.

"Yeah, I reckon so. Everybody says they will. Right nice kid, too."

"I read somethin' in a Silver Butte paper about hi-graders down in Galena City," said Hank.

"Oh, shore," agreed Gib heartily. "Yuh hear about 'em, but they're pretty smart. Hank, they've shore got some awful pretty girls in the honkatonks down there."

"Don't tell me about 'em," growled Hank.

"And them poker games!" exclaimed Gib. "Man, man! No limit. Why, I've seen—"

THE banging at the kitchen doorway, as the cook belabored the big triangle, broke off all conversation, as the crew surged in the direction of the dining-room. Everything else was forgotten in the anticipation of good food. After supper was over, Hashknife went to Hank Nevins and said:

"Hank, I like you and I like yore spread, but I reckon me and Sleepy are headin' for Galena City in the mornin'."

Hank smiled grimly, but nodded in agreement.

"You ain't believin' Gib's lies, are yuh, Hashknife?" he asked.

"No, no. It's—well, we've been here a month, Hank. That ain't bad for me and him. Mebbe we'll drift back some day."

"You'll shore be welcome—both of yuh. I'll have yore wages, when yuh get ready to drift—and good luck to both of yuh."

Sleepy had not discussed things with Hashknife, but when Hashknife went back to the bunkhouse, Sleepy was already putting his things in his worn war-sack. He knew Hashknife. His years of close association with the tall, gray-eyed cowboy had taught him the symptoms. Ghosts in a deserted town—and a young cowboy facing a rope.

"Hank will have our pay ready in the mornin', pardner," said Hashknife.

"Uh-huh," nodded Sleepy. "Mebbe we better tack some shoes on them broncs before we leave. It's close to a hundred miles to Galena City."

"Shoe 'em in Silver Butte," said Hashknife, closing the incident.

They were a queer pair, these drifting cowboys. Hashknife Hartley, close to six and a half feet in height, lean, powerful, with a long, lean face, a generous nose and a wide, thin-lipped mouth. His hair was sort of a roan color, and a long lock of it usually straggled down over his forehead, intersecting with his left eyebrow. No one had ever looked into his eyes and forgot him; gray eyes that seemed to look deep into a man's mind, or soul. That was what Shorty meant.

Hashknife, christened Henry, was born in the Milk River country of Montana, son of an itinerant range minister of the gospel, and obliged to make his own living at an early age. Born of a race that refused to take root, he started drifting across the ranges. At the ranch which gave him his nickname, he met Sleepy Stevens, a young puncher who had drifted down from Idaho. Sleepy was shorter than Hashknife, broad of shoulder, long-armed, powerful, and with a broad sense of humor. Both of them were top-hand cowboys, capable of bossing a big spread, but their heritage of gypsy blood forbade steady work.

Forming a non-profitable and dangerous partnership, they began drifting together, always seeking what they might find on the other side of the hill. At times they would accept employment on some ranch, but only long enough to acquire a small stake. Their needs were few, and home was where they hung their hats.

Hashknife's mind was as keen as his eyes. Any range mystery was a direct challenge to him. Men outside the law

spoke softly of him around their camp fires—softly and bitterly. When range detectives failed, Hashknife and Sleepy were in demand, although Hashknife did not relish working for anyone. He much preferred to handle the case in his own

way, and ride away ahead of any adulation or reward. It was all in a day's work.

Life had not been easy. Death had struck at them many times, but missed its target. Neither of them claimed to be split-second gunmen, but they knew *when* to shoot. Their life had made them confirmed fatalists, knowing that they would not meet their end, until their number was up.

Sleepy was no analyst. He was content to let Hashknife do that, while he trailed around, mostly in ignorance of conditions, until Hashknife gave the word. But when guns flamed, or a hard fist was in order, Sleepy Stevens was plainly in evidence. He grinned at the world, and shot fast and straight, when shooting was needed.

HASHKNIFE and Sleepy arrived in Silver Butte in the late afternoon, two days of riding from the Flying H. Silver Butte was merely a small town on the railroad, forty miles north of Galena City. The branch line into the valley was well under way, but not completed.

Hashknife and Sleepy, after a visit to the barber shop and a good meal, wandered down to the stage depot. Because of the heat, the stage to Galena left at eight o'clock at night.

The stage, with its four horses, was already in front of the depot, and the gangling driver was putting on his load of merchandise and baggage.

Hashknife and Sleepy stopped on the edge of the sidewalk, watching the driver lash on his load, when a young lady came out of the depot and approached the driver. She was well dressed, and even in the poor light from the depot windows, they could see that she was pretty.

"Would it be possible for me to ride outside with you?" she asked.

The driver yanked a rope tight, spat dryly and shook his head.

"Me and the guard is all that seat'll hold, Ma'am," he replied. "You'll be comfortable inside."

"I'm afraid not," she replied and turned away. The driver held a rope-end and watched her go back into the depot.

"Ain't this trip tough enough, without skittish women?" he asked the world aloud.

"Skittish women?" queried Hashknife.

The driver turned and looked them over. "Yeah," he replied.

"What's she skittish about, pardner?"

"Well, I'll tell yuh," replied the driver quietly. "Gus Lane is up here from Galena City, and he's goin' back with me t'night. Gus owns the Hondo Saloon down there, and he shore thinks he's hell with women. Mebbe he's made eyes at her—I dunno."

"Who's the lady?" asked Sleepy.

"I dunno—never seen her before. I can't know everybody."

"What sort of a hairpin is this Gus Lane?" asked Hashknife.

The driver shrugged his shoulders. "*Quien sabe?* He runs the biggest saloon in the valley. Big gambler—pretty much big down there."

"And this young lady don't fancy ridin' forty miles, cooped up in the stage with Gus Lane, eh?" remarked Hashknife.

"Well," said the driver, lowering his voice, "jist between me and you, I don't blame her a damn bit. Hate to do it m'self."

"Uh-huh. When does yore stage leave?"

"Right away. I'll call 'em."

The driver went over to the stage office doorway and announced that the Galena City stage was about to leave. The girl hurried out past him and got into the stage, while behind her, sauntering jauntily was Gus Lane. The lamplight flashed on the diamond in his necktie, and he seemed amused at something. The guard mounted the seat, armed with a sawed-off shotgun, while the driver waited to close the stage door.

Gus Lane reached for the handle on the door, when Hashknife stepped in front of him, blocking his entrance. The jolt knocked Gus' hat on the back of his head,

and he reached for it with both hands. He smelled strongly of liquor.

"What the hell are yuh tryin' to do, you clumsy fool!" he snorted.

Hashknife placed a hand against his chest, shoved hard, and the back of Gus Lane's knees hit the sidewalk, and he sat down heavily.

"Why, you—" Lane started to get up, but the weight of Sleepy's right hand on top of his head stopped him short.

"Go ahead, driver!" called Hashknife, and with a lurch the team started on its journey to Galena City.

GUS LANE squirmed and cursed, but Sleepy held firm. Finally he let the big gambler get to his feet. Lane had lost his hat in the dust, and was fighting mad. He dug into his pocket for a gun, but Hashknife crashed him against a porch-post and took the gun away from him.

"What the hell's this all about?" wailed the gambler. "What right have you got—"

"The lady didn't want to be annoyed," interrupted Hashknife. He had picked up the crushed and dusty hat, and now he yanked it down over Lane's head, almost putting him down again. Then they walked away from the incoherent gambler, leaving him to curse and splutter.

"A nice start we've made," complained Sleepy, as they halted to look in a lighted window of a store. "Agitatin' one of their biggest citizens, before we ever get to the town."

"Big citizens don't annoy ladies," replied Hashknife.

In the lobby of a little hotel a group of men were discussing news from Galena City.

A new arrival was telling them the latest developments in their murder trial.

"They'll hang Steve McLeod jist as sure as anythin'," he declared. "The case is jist about ready for the jury, and everybody feels that young McLeod killed the old hermit for his money, and then burned the house, tryin' to destroy the evidence."

"But they ain't never found the money, have they?" asked one of the group.

"Not a red cent of it. If McLeod got it, he's shore keepin' still about it. Funny about that old hermit's will, him leavin' everythin' to his niece. The lawyer says she's due down there pretty soon, but all she'll get is a section of land, a few head of cows, and a pile of ashes that used to be a house. A hell of an inheritance, if yuh ask me."

"And grazin' land at two-bits an acre," remarked another.

"What evidence have they got that McLeod killed the old man?"

"Well, they say that McLeod threatened the old man, and the next thing they knowed the old man was dead and burned to a crisp. It stands to reason that McLeod done it. Nobody else had trouble with the old man."

"They ain't seen no more ghosts down there, have they?" laughed one of the men.

"I ain't heard of any. Aw, that was just a drunken cowpuncher's imagination."

Hashknife and Sleepy went up to their room, tired enough to go to bed early.

"Yuh hear what that man said?" asked Sleepy, as he undressed. "The ghost was a drunken cowpuncher's imagination."

"Three ghosts," corrected Hashknife. "But they can wait. How'd you like to be facin' a rope on the evidence we've heard against young McLeod?"

"Yeah, that wouldn't be so awful good, pardner. Seems to me that we should have been there long ago, if we was goin' to help him out. The trail must be pretty cold by this time."

"If McLeod didn't kill him—the killer must still be there, Sleepy. Anyway, Galena City is on the other side of some hills."

THE temperature in the courtroom at Galena City must have been well over a hundred. Every seat, every available space was taken, as the foreman of the jury, a tall, gaunt cattleman, stood up.

Hashknife and Sleepy were standing near the door, which led into a hallway—the only entrance or exit to the room.

Steve McLeod, the prisoner, was seated beside Elmer Davidson, the sheriff, his shackled hands resting on the table. Steve was a good-looking young cowboy, possibly twenty-five. He seemed relaxed, as he lifted his eyes and looked at the foreman.

The room was silent, but through an open window, directly behind the sheriff and prisoner, came the voice of a drunken cowboy out on the street, singing:

"I've got a saddle,
I've got a gun,
And I'm headin' for my dear old Texas
ho-o-o-ome."

Steve's shoulders seemed to tense. Someone chuckled, and the keen eyes of the elderly judge searched the room. Then he said:

"Gentlemen of the jury, have you reached a decision?"

"We have, yore honor," replied the foreman. The deputy sheriff, Smoky Summers, took the written verdict from the foreman and handed it to the judge.

The judge adjusted his glasses carefully and read the verdict, his lips moving, as he deciphered the written scrawl. Then he shifted in his chair, took a deep breath and said, "Steve McLeod, the jury has found you guilty of murder in the first degree."

There was not a sound. All eyes were upon the young cowboy, who was sitting there, staring into space.

"Steve McLeod, stand up," said the judge huskily. Steve made no move, so the sheriff touched him on the arm, whispering in his ear.

Slowly the cowboy got to his feet, facing the judge. For several moments they looked at each other, and then the judge said:

"Steve, you have been found guilty of murder. Is there any reason why sentence should not be passed upon you at this time?"

Steve's head slowly turned and he looked at the jury. He shifted his eyes to the judge, placing his manacled hands against the edge of the table.

"Well, I'll tell yuh judge," he drawled, "if yuh don't mind—"

Then Steve McLeod acted. With a kick-back of his right foot, he sent his chair spinning, leaped backwards, and before anyone had any idea of his intentions he had knocked a man aside and leaped squarely through the window. They heard him crash on the sloping top of a porch, where he leaped to the street. The sheriff ran to the window, but tripped over a chair. The deputy sheriff was trying to fight his way to the door, but that was impossible, because the crowd had surged into the aisles.

STEVE, limping slightly from his leap for freedom, ran across the street, where he vaulted into a saddle, and raced away up the street. By that time the sheriff had reached the window, and fired several ineffectual shots at the fast disappearing horse and rider.

"That bronc was ready for him!" yelled a man at a window. "It was untied, I tell yuh—and Steve's got a gun!"

The door was finally opened and the crowd surged down the narrow stairs, but there was no need for hurry. Steve McLeod, well mounted, armed, and with a wide knowledge of the country, was far away. No one seemed particularly sad over the getaway, unless it was Sheriff Davidson, who bewailed his negligence. Hashknife and Sleepy were amused. Hashknife had heard the drunken singer, and he surmised that the song was a signal to Steve that everything was ready for him to make his escape.

Sheriff Davidson was a small, grizzled man, with a mustache that fuzzed like the whiskers of a bob-cat. Smoky Summers,

the deputy, was a big, gangling person, with big hands, big feet, and with a none too heavy outlook on life. Slim Watson, the marshal of Galena City, was six feet five inches tall, with a long, sad countenance, an inherited hook-worm, and a pessimistic outlook on life. After a heavy rain, Slim might weigh a hundred and sixty.

Slim shook his head sadly. "That's what yuh git for trustin'," he declared. "'F it had been mine, I'd have nailed his dog-gone boots to the floor."

"Mebbe," said Smoky, "if we git another murderer we'll let you act as his guard, Slim."

"I got my own business to tend to," replied Slim.

"Why don'tcha?"

Hashknife and Sleepy found Smoky in the sheriff's office, and introduced themselves.

"Yeah, I noticed yuh in the courtroom," said Smoky. "In my business we've kinda got to notice strangers. Set down, boys, and tell me what I can do for yuh. What'd yuh think of Steve's getaway? Slick, eh?"

"The sheriff," said Hashknife, "was negligent."

"He was what?"

"Trusted Steve too far."

"Oh, yeah—I noticed that."

"In yore business, you have to notice things," reminded Sleepy soberly.

"Yeah, that's right. Yuh say you've been with the Flyin' H? How's Hank Nevins? I used to work for the Flyin' H, before I stepped up in the world. Been a deputy sheriff eight months now—and like it fine."

"Nice lookin' badge yuh got," remarked Sleepy. "Kinda hard to keep it shinin' thataway, ain't it?"

"Oh, not if yuh keep after it. I got me a shinin' rag."

"That's the stuff," said Sleepy.

Smoky started to roll a cigarette, turned his head and looked keenly at Hashknife for several moments.

"Hartley," he said, half to himself, "you don't happen to be Hashknife Hartley, do yuh?"

"Possibly."

"Well, I'll be damned! Say, I've heard of you."

"What'd yuh hear?" asked Sleepy curiously.

"I've got a brother in Santa Ynez," replied Smoky. "He's a bartender down there, and he wrote me a long letter. By golly, I'm shore glad to meetcha. Howard—that's my brother—is such a damn liar, I didn't believe you two ever existed. I'm glad he's exonerated?"

"It is kinda nice," said Hashknife soberly. "What's the chances of catchin' Steve McLeod—now that he's loose?"

SMOKY shook his head. "Not for a while at least. Steve knows this country like a book."

"Did you ever know a puncher named Gibson?" asked Hashknife.

"Yeah—sure. He went back to the Flyin' H, didn't he?"

"And brought us a story of ghosts."

"Ghosts? Oh, yeah, that's right."

Smoky laughed heartily. "When any puncher gets drunk and goes over to Ghost Town—if he's drunk enough—he sees ghosts. Hell, he goes to see 'em, don't he? That's the answer."

Hashknife nodded soberly. "They tell me that the old hermit left all his wealth to his niece."

"She's here," said Smoky. "Come in on the stage yesterday mornin', and she's a mighty pretty girl. But Hermit Bill never left anythin', but a mile square of land and a ash heap. He was half loco, anyway."

"What was his right name?" asked Sleepy.

"Smith," grinned Smoky. "Bill Smith—take it or leave it."

"It might be his right name," said Hashknife. "There's a lot of Smiths in the world."

"The girl's name is Mary Allard. I seen

her a couple times talkin' to Sam Dyson. He's the lawyer that had the will."

The sheriff came in, and Smoky introduced him to Hashknife and Sleepy. The sheriff was still fuming over losing his prisoner.

"I don't see how the hell he got away like that," he complained. "He was handcuffed."

"You've knowed him long enough to know that he didn't walk on his hands, Elmer," said the deputy soberly.

"Don't be so damned smart. Steve had outside help, I tell yuh. Somebody had a horse and a gun ready for him."

"A feller like Steve," remarked Smoky, "don't lose *all* his friends, jist because the law says he's guilty of somethin'."

"Well, he'll have a hell of a time gettin' rid of them cuffs."

"Until he gets to a blacksmith shop," said Smoky.

"Yeah, I s'pose. New ones, too—and I had to buy 'em."

The deputy said, "Elmer, these are the two men my brother wrote me about from Santa Ynez—the two fellers that busted up that smugglin' gang. I read the letter to yuh, if yuh remember."

"Oh, yea-a-a-ah."

The sheriff looked at them curiously.

"Jist how did you fellers happen to come down here?" he asked.

"Lookin' for ghosts," replied Hashknife soberly.

"Ghosts? Lookin' for—hu-u-uh?"

"You remember Tom Gibson, Elmer," said the deputy. "They knowed him at the Flyin' H."

"Oh, yea-a-ah! Tom Gibson. I remember him a-seein' a ghost over at Ghost Town."

"Three ghosts," corrected Hashknife.

The sheriff laughed. "Prob'ly be six the next time Gib tells it."

"That's right," agreed Smoky. "Gib's a real good liar."

Slim Watson, the marshal, dropped in to rest his feet. He looked mournfully at the sheriff and sat down on the corner of the desk. Smoky introduced Hashknife and Sleepy, but Slim didn't seem interested.

"Feet been hurtin' me," he complained, easing one boot half off his right foot. "Somebody stepped on my toes, when McLeod got away, and another waddie cut my sock with his spur, when I took off my boot to see if I've got any toes left. Ah-h-h, that feels good!"

"Hartley was askin' about ghosts," remarked Smoky. "You ain't seen none, have yuh, Slim?"

"Ghosts? What about ghosts, Smoky?"

"Hartley and Stevens are from the Flyin' H, and Tom Gibson told them he seen three ghosts one night at Ghost Town."

"Oh, him!" snorted Slim. "Ghosts! Well, I—sa-a-ay! Hartley? Did I get that name right? Huh? Was you ever down in the Ghost Hills range—oh, 'bout nine, ten years ago?"

"No, I don't believe I was," lied Hashknife easily.

"Uh-huh. Feller named Hartley *was* down there. Had kind of a funny nickname, I believe. Lemme see-e-e-e—"

"Hashknife?" queried Smoky.

Slim Watson turned quickly. "That's the name, Smoky. How'd you—?" Slim turned and looked keenly at Hashknife for a moment. "So yo're Hashknife Hartley, eh?"

"That's what they call me," smiled Hashknife.

Slim drew a deep breath and shrugged his shoulders. "All I've got to say," he remarked, "is that if half I've heard about yuh is true, I'd rather be with yuh than again yuh, Hartley."

"Maybe the stories about me are a whole lot like Gibson's stories of the three ghosts —they grow with the tellin'."

Slim's melancholy eyes looked Hashknife over carefully, from his worn, high-heel boots, snug-fitting overalls to his old black Stetson, not overlooking the hand-made, perfect fitting cartridge belt, and the black-handled Colt .45 in a short holster. His eyes shifted to Sleepy, whose garb was almost identical. They were just a pair of run-of-the-mill cowpunchers, as far as appearances were concerned, and yet the stories Slim had heard about them—

"And you two are a-huntin' for ghosts, eh?" he said.

Hashknife laughed. "They're interestin', Slim."

"Uh-huh."

Slim thought the matter over for several moments. Then he said, "When'd you fellers leave Silver Butte?"

Hashknife told him, wondering at the question.

Slim rubbed the back of his neck violently. "By any chance was you and yore pardner the two fellers that kept Gus Lane from takin' the night stage out of Silver Butte?"

"Couldn't hardly been us," said Hashknife, "'cause we don't know the gent."

"That fits—he said they was strangers."

"Might have been a couple other fellers," suggested Sleepy.

"Yeah, mebbe it was. None of my business, anyway."

"I didn't hear about that, Slim," said Smoky.

"Yuh might ask Gus," replied the marshal. "He'll tell it to yuh—with gestures. Well, I've got to meander along. Pleased to have met yuh, gentlemen."

The sheriff went out with the marshal and they walked up the street together. Smoky said, "It's none of my business, of course, but Lane's used to havin' his own way around here."

"Suits us," said Hashknife. "As I said, we don't know the gent."

"As far as that goes, I don't like him either," said Smoky. "He's too runty to suit me. City man. Wears white shirts and enough diamonds to light up a church. But he's plenty forked, I'll say that much."

"You ain't warnin' us, are yuh Smoky?" asked Sleepy wide-eyed.

SMOKY looked soberly at Sleepy. "Yo're strangers here," he said. "Gus Lane has got plenty *mucho malo hombres* around his place, and they shore like to please the boss. I reckon it's always kinda nice to know things—ahead of time."

"We're much obliged, Smoky," said Hashknife. "We appreciate it."

"I hope to tell yuh," added Sleepy sincerely.

They left the office and strolled around the town. Until gold had been struck in the surrounding hills, Galena had been a cow-town. The newer buildings were all of cheap construction. The Hondo Saloon, owned by Gus Lane, had been rebuilt in part, but unpainted on the outside. It was a big roomy place, with quite a number of gambling layouts in the main room. The honkatonk was in a large annex. A wide balcony circled one side and both ends, off which were rooms. A wide stairway led from the main floor to the balcony.

The bar was about seventy feet long, where a large force of bartenders worked on payday, or special nights, when the whole country celebrated.

Hashknife and Sleepy looked over the Hondo. Gus Lane was at the bar, talking with Slim Watson, the marshal. Business was slack at this time of day. Gus Lane turned casually and took a good look at Hashknife and Sleepy, scowled thoughtfully and turned back. Hashknife knew that the marshal had called Lane's attention to them, and Lane's expression would

indicate that Lane was not exactly sure that these were the two men who had humiliated him in Silver Butte.

They sauntered back to the hotel, and in the little lobby they saw Mary Allard, the girl on the stage. She was talking with a Mexican boy, who had given her a letter. She read the letter quickly, a puzzled expression in her eyes, and looked up to see Hashknife standing near her. She looked at him for several moments, before recognizing him.

"Howdy," smiled the tall cowboy.

"Oh, it really is—you!" she exclaimed. "I—I wasn't sure. You see, I wanted to thank you, but it was so sudden, and we were going."

"Well, we didn't want any thanks, Ma'am," he smiled.

"I am sure you saved me a very uncomfortable trip, Mr.—er—"

"Hartley, Ma'am. This is Sleepy Stevens."

"How do you do, Mr. Stevens."

"I didn't get the name," said Sleepy soberly.

"My name? Of course you didn't. I am Mary Allard."

"We might sit down and talk about it," suggested Hashknife. They pulled three chairs together near the corner of the room, and sat down.

"Yuh see," explained Hashknife, "we're all strangers down here."

"Oh, are you strangers, too?" said Mary. "But of course you understand the way of this country, which makes it much easier."

"It does help a little," admitted Sleepy.

"We've heard about you," said Hashknife, "and yore inheritance."

"You have? Isn't it queer? I mean, they can't find any money, and they tell me the ranch isn't worth anything. The lawyer did not tell me that part of it, and I spent most of my—"

Mary hesitated and looked at Hashknife, who nodded slowly.

"Yeah, we heard that, Miss Allard. I mean, we heard that the ranch ain't worth much, and that there wasn't any money."

"Yes, I guess that is true. Mr. Hartley, what was the name of the man who escaped from the courtroom?"

"Steve McLeod."

"I'm sure he doesn't know who I am, but—you saw that little boy, who gave me that note? He doesn't talk English, or wouldn't. I want you to read the note."

The plain envelope was soiled and wrinkled, with no address, and the enclosed note had been scribbled on a piece of wrapping paper. It read:

Miss Allard, don't sell that ranch.
Steve McLeod.

"That's kinda funny," mused Hashknife. "I wonder why he advises yuh to not sell that ranch. Has anybody made yuh an offer?"

"Not yet, Mr. Hartley. Why, the lawyer told me it wasn't worth more than twenty-five cents an acre."

"Of course, you haven't seen it yet," remarked Sleepy.

"No, I haven't. Anyway, I haven't any ideas on land values."

"Uh-huh," said Hashknife thoughtfully, as he gave her the note.

"What would you advise me to do about it, Mr. Hartley?" she asked.

"Well," smiled Hashknife, "I don't know any of the angles, but if it was me, I'd string along with Steve."

"You mean—not sell the ranch?"

"Well, I'd hang onto it for awhile. Is Sam Dyson yore lawyer?"

"Mr. Dyson wrote me about the will, but I am afraid I am in no position to have a lawyer. Mr. Dyson has been very kind."

"That's fine. Mebbe Steve McLeod will write you again. I'd wait and see what happens."

"I'll stay awhile," she said, "but I can't stay long. Had I known the situation, I would never have spent the money for the

trip. But I was led to believe that my uncle had left me money."

"What was your uncle's right name?" queried Hashknife.

"William Andrews Smith."

"Well," grinned Sleepy, "it wasn't an alias, after all."

"How well did yuh know yore uncle?" asked Hashknife.

"I never knew him at all. He was my mother's brother, and they say he was very wild. In some way he found out where I lived. I haven't even any idea what he looked like. When I was a little girl, I remember that something happened to my uncle. It is only a dim remembrance of my father saying, 'I am not surprised at anything Bill might do.' I had almost forgotten that I had an uncle of that name, until I got a letter from Mr. Dyson."

"Well," said Hashknife, "we'll try and find out why Steve McLeod wrote you that note, Miss Allard—and why he don't want yuh to sell that ranch."

"I am very curious," she said.

"Not to look at—yuh ain't," declared Sleepy.

Mary laughed heartily. "That *is* a compliment," she declared.

SAM DYSON, the lawyer, came into the lobby, and Mary introduced him to Hashknife and Sleepy.

"These are the two men I told you about, Mr. Dyson—the ones who prevented that man from getting on the stage in Silver Butte," she said.

Sam Dyson was about forty years of age, a rather colorless sort of a person, with a sallow skin, faded blue eyes and a weak chin.

He said, "Oh, I see."

"Show him that note," suggested Hashknife. Mary gave the note to Dyson, after telling him about it being delivered by a little Mexican boy. Dyson read the note, scowled for a moment, and gave it back to her.

"I don't understand it," he said. "What is Steve's interest, and why not sell the place? It's worthless."

"Who," asked Hashknife, "is buyin' worthless property?"

"Oh, I didn't mean it that way. I meant, in case she got a buyer."

"It must be of some importance," said Hashknife. "A man runnin' away from the law don't stop to write notes about somethin' that is of no importance. What do yuh suppose is his interest in that piece of worthless land, Mr. Dyson?"

"I have no idea, sir. And," Dyson smiled faintly, "if I may ask, what is your interest?"

"I like puzzles," replied Hashknife.

"Oh, I see. You—er—don't happen to want to purchase that property yourself, do you?"

"I may look it over," replied Hashknife soberly.

"I see. Well, Miss Allard, if you need my services, do not hesitate to get in touch with me."

"Thank you, Mr. Dyson."

The lawyer hurried away. Mary looked at Hashknife, who seemed very thoughtful, as he rubbed his chin with his right thumb.

"What do you think of Mr. Dyson?" she asked curiously.

"Oh, yeah—Mr. Dyson. Well, I'll tell yuh, Miss Allard, I believe I'd still string along with Steve McLeod for awhile. Do yuh know what a hydrofoby skunk is?"

"No, I don't, Mr. Hartley."

"Well, I do. It has a scent that yuh never forget. Even when they're peaceful and contented, they still emit an odor that classifies 'em. I'm goin' to be awful fooled, if somebody don't try to buy that ranch from you. In fact, I'm goin' to be downright disappointed."

"You — you think it might be worth something after all?"

"Well, it can't be worth less than two-bits an acre. Anythin' over that is pure velvet. Listen to an offer, but don't sell."

Next morning Hashknife and Sleepy saddled their horses and rode out to look at Hermit Bill's ranch. It was back in the broken hills, most of it brush and rock-covered, and of very little value, even as grazing land. Evidently Hermit Bill did not try to improve it. There was a small spring of water near the ashes of the old ranchhouse.

Part of the old corral fence was still standing, but everything else had burned. An old anvil stood bravely on the charred stump, in the pile of ashes that must have been the blacksmith shop. From the ashes of the building they could look down on most of the acreage. From what they could learn Hermit Bill had been shot through the head, and the house set on fire.

Hashknife took a long stick and dug through the ashes of the old ranchhouse, where he uncovered an old Colt revolver, badly burned and battered. From the ashes of the old blacksmith shop he dug out a number of pieces of old iron, horseshoes and several tools, the handles burned out.

"Are yuh lookin' for anythin' special?" queried Sleepy. "If yuh are, I'll get me a stick and help yuh rake."

Hashknife shook his head. "Just curiosity, I reckon," he said.

Sleepy stretched out on the ground and rolled a cigarette, while Hashknife hunkered on his heels and examined his findings. Finally he said to Sleepy, "C'mere and look at this, will yuh?"

It was a curious looking piece of metal about three inches long, with what seemed to be a broken hinge on one end, a slot through one side, and a keyhole. Sleepy looked it over carefully.

"Funny lookin' thing," he decided. "What is it?"

"Part of a pair of handcuffs," said Hashknife.

"Yeah, that's right," agreed Sleepy.

"And the hinge has been smashed with a chisel," said Hashknife.

"Well, mebbe it has. Prob'ly been a lot of handcuffs smashed in Arizona blacksmith shops."

"Uh-huh. Well, there don't seem to be much of interest around this ash-heap, pardner."

"Yuh didn't expect to find anythin' did yuh?"

Hashknife grinned slowly. "Don't the Bible say somethin' about 'Seek and ye shall find'?"

"It didn't work out in yore case," said Sleepy.

"Mebbe not. Anyway, it was a nice ride up here."

They rode across the ranch on their way back to town, but there was no visible reason for anyone even paying twenty-five cents an acre for it. They saw several head of cattle, branded with the Bar S, which was the brand of Hermit Bill.

THEN they took a cattle trail, which led to Steve McLeod's ranchhouse, a small tumble-down affair, with patched fences. Smoky had told them about Poco Salas, a diminutive Mexican, who was Steve's cook, housekeeper, wrangler, and anything else that needed doing. Poco was about forty, small of stature, but rather broad, and with a bandit-like mustache. His teeth flashed in a smile, but his eyes were full of suspicion, as he said:

"Buenas dias, senors. How am I?"

"All right, I hope," smiled Hashknife.

"Buena. You look for sometheeng besides?"

"Besides what?" queried Hashknife.

"Beside Steve."

"We wasn't lookin' for Steve," laughed Hashknife. "We've been lookin' at the old hermit's place; so we rode down here on the way back."

"You know Onkle Beel?" asked Poco.

"So yuh called him Uncle Bill, eh?"

Poco shrugged his shoulders. "W'at the hell?" he queried. "He ees too ol' to be call Beel; so I'm call heem Onkle Beel."

"What'd he call you?" asked Sleepy.

"Those damn *Mejicano,*" replied Poco soberly.

Hashknife laughed and threw back his head. Perhaps that action saved his life, because a rifle bullet took a quarter-inch square of skin off his right cheek-bone, and from out on the hillside came the rattling report of the rifle. Another bullet ripped through Sleepy's shirt sleeve, barely burning the skin on his forearm.

Poco Salas seemed to sail on invisible wings into the kitchen, with Hashknife and Sleepy doing a dead-heat close behind him, as more bullets splintered the half-open door. One came through the window and smashed into some canned goods on the shelf.

"*Madre de Dios!*" howled Poco. "Son-of-a-gonn, what ees goin' on?"

Hashknife had kicked the door shut and was peering through the none-too-clean window, trying to locate the shooters.

"Look at that sleeve, will yuh?" wailed Sleepy. "That shirt cost me a whole dollar in Silver Butte—and now look at it! Oh, oh! Is that a bullet scrape across yore cheek, Hashknife?"

"That," replied Hashknife, "is what yuh might call a close shave."

Poco looked them over soberly. "Somebodee ees weeshing you for a keeling, eh?" he remarked.

"That don't happen to be Steve McLeod out there, does it?" queried Sleepy.

Poco spread his palms, eyes wide in depreciation of such an idea. "That ees not Steve," he declared. "No, no! Steve ees not for shooting a man een your back. *Por Dios,* no!"

"Got any idea who it might be?" asked Hashknife.

Poco shook his head. "I am surprise like hell."

"Three of us in that same fix," said Sleepy dryly. "What's wrong with folks around here, anyway? Can't a stranger expose his back to the open hills, without gettin' it filled with lead?"

"You are not escare?" queried Poco.

"Of course, we're scared," replied Sleepy. "Ain't you?"

"I geeve you my word, and I cross your heart, you hope I die," declared Poco soberly. "W'y somebody shoot at you?"

Hashknife shook his head, as he peered through the window.

"The only folks we've met are the sheriff, the deputy and a lawyer," he said. "I don't believe they want to kill us."

"I'm theenk somebody mak' meestake."

"Yeah, I think they have," said Sleepy meaningly.

Hashknife was watching closely, twisting his head, as his eyes scanned the brushy hills. Finally he turned to Sleepy.

"Two men," he said, "topped a hog-back, headin' east. One was ridin' a pinto and the other looked like a black. Too far to be sure."

"Who rides a pinto?" asked Sleepy. Poco scowled thoughtfully. "Tom East ees ride a *pintado,*" he said.

"Who's Tom East?"

Poco shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know heem good. I theenk he ees *amigo*

weeth Gos Lane. He ees look like *vaquero.*"

"A friend of Gus Lane, eh?" mused Hashknife. "I see. Thanks, Poco."

"Think it's safe to pull out?" queried Sleepy.

"Yeah, I reckon so," replied Hashknife. They walked into the yard and secured their horses. Hashknife said to Poco:

"If yuh see Steve McLeod, yuh might tell him that we'd like to have a talk with him. We're at the Galena Hotel."

"You are officer from the laws?" queried the Mexican.

"No," replied Hashknife, "we're not officers, Poco. Tell Steve we're tryin' to help Miss Allard."

"Sure," nodded Poco. *"Hasta luego."*

"This don't make sense," complained Sleepy, as they rode back to Galena City.

"No, it don't," agreed Hashknife. "It may be that Gus Lane resented what we did to him in Silver Butte, and sent a couple gunmen to teach us a lesson. Them fellers wasn't foolin', Sleepy; they were shootin' for keeps."

Sleepy looked at his slit sleeve and nodded soberly.

"Yuh don't suppose they resented us takin' a look at the old hermit's ranch, do yuh?" he asked.

"Who knows?" replied Hashknife. "This deal may be a lot deeper than it looks on the surface. I'd sure like to have a talk with Steve McLeod, and find out more. He knows somethin' about that ranch, or he wouldn't have sent Mary Allard that note."

They stabled their horses in Granite City and went to the sheriff's office, where they found Smoky Summers, half asleep over a paper-covered book.

"I'll tell yuh about me," he said soberly. "If I ever git enough money, I'm shore goin' to them there South Sea Islands. I been a-readin' about how yuh don't have to wear nothin' in particular, spend yore days in the shade of a palm tree and live on lobsters and cocoanuts, with beautiful females, dressed in grass, dancin' and playin' for yuh all the time. Man, I could take a few years of that!"

"This country ain't so bad," said Sleepy.

"Huh! What's good about it, I ask yuh? I ain't never seen a lobster, except in a picture, and the only cocoanut I ever seen was on a cake."

"How about the grass-wearin' female dancers?" asked Hashknife.

"You try to find one around here. I kinda hone for the balmy air of the ocean, even if I ain't never seen any ocean. Yuh know, I can't quite figure things out. Hundreds of miles of deep water, jist goin' to waste, as yuh might say, while out here men shoot each other over a danged water hole the size of yore hat."

"Supply and demand, I reckon," yawned Hashknife.

Smoky looked at him closely. "What happened to yore cheek?" he asked curiously.

"Bullet," replied Hashknife. Sleepy held up his arm, showing the rent in his sleeve.

"Another bullet," he stated soberly.

"Well, great lovely dove!" blurted Smoky in amazement. "Who shot at yuh —and where?"

"Two men," said Hashknife. "One rode a pinto. We were out at Steve McLeod's ranchhouse, talkin' to Poco."

"My Gowd, they came close!" exclaimed Smoky. "Took the tip right off yore cheek. Kinda blacked yore eye, too. Pardner, you wasn't far from the Heavenly Hosts, as the minister says. I've often wondered about the pearly gates and the golden streets."

"What are yuh wonderin' about?" asked Sleepy.

"What holds 'em up."

"Gravity," explained Sleepy. "After yuh git above a certain height it pulls the other way."

"Oh, yeah, I reckon it does. You say one man rode a pinto?"

"And the other a black or dark bay. They was quite a ways from me, when I seen 'em," said Hashknife.

"Hm-m-m-m. Pinto, eh?" Smoky went to the doorway and looked at the hitch-racks along the street. A black-and-white pinto was tied with other horses at the Galena Saloon rack.

That was the only spotted horse on the street. Smoky rubbed his chin and came back to his chair.

"You don't happen to know Tom East, do yuh?" he asked casually.

Hashknife shook his head. "What about him, Smoky?"

"Nothin'—I was jist wonderin'."

"Rides a pinto, don't he?"

"Well, I know he's got a pinto. But if yuh don't know him—"

"We don't know much about the etiquette down here," said Sleepy, "but do yuh have to know a man real well before yuh shoot him?"

"Well, at least yuh ought to have a reason," said Smoky.

He went back to the doorway and looked up the street.

"There's Tom East and Mac Oertli just ridin' away," he said.

Hashknife and Sleepy joined him. Tom East was riding a pinto, while Mac Oertli rode a dark bay.

"What's their business?" asked Hashknife.

"None to mention," replied Smoky. "Both of 'em gamble a little. Tom works as a bartender once in a while, when business is heavy. Oertli claims to be a minin' engineer, but I ain't never seen him workin' at it. Mostly they hang around Gus Lane."

"In other words," said Hashknife, "they're gunmen for Gus Lane."

"I dunno about that part of it, Hartley; they ain't killed anybody yet."

"Now, how about it—could you swear to that, Smoky?"

"Could I—well, no, I don't reckon I could swear to it."

"Uh-huh. What's the sheriff done toward findin' Steve McLeod?"

"Exactly nothin'," replied Smoky flatly.

"Uh-huh. Is the sheriff a close friend of Gus Lane?"

"You shore ask a lot of questions," smiled Smoky. "No, I don't believe Elmer Davidson is too friendly with Gus Lane. Gus wants to run everythin', and Elmer don't like to take orders. Why'd you ask that?"

Hashknife ignored the question. "Is Dyson and Lane close friends?"

"Yeah, I believe they are, Hartley. But what—"

"Just curiosity."

"What about Slim Watson?" queried Sleepy. "Is he *mucho amigo* with Gus Lane?"

"Gus Lane got him elected marshal," replied Smoky meaningly.

"Gus Lane," smiled Hashknife, "is a pretty big man around here."

Smoky nodded soberly. "Yeah, I'm beginnin' to think so, too."

"Well," smiled Hashknife, "that fact don't ruin my appetite; so we better get some food, pardner."

FROM a buggy, driven by Sam Dyson the lawyer, Mary Allard got her first view of her legacy. Dyson had insisted that she must see the place; so she went with him. They halted beside the ashheap, which had been the ranchhouse, and got out of the buggy.

"Well, it isn't much to look at," sighed Mary.

Dyson laughed. "No, but I wanted you to see what it looked like," he said. "I believe there are actually twenty-six head of cattle wearing the brand of this ranch. The land is worth about twenty-five cents an acre, which makes a total of one hundred and forty dollars. I would say that the cattle, such as they are, may be worth ten dollars per head. I believe I can get you about four hundred dollars for the land and cattle."

"The price is too small, Dyson," drawled a voice behind them, and they turned quickly to see Steve McLeod, who had stepped out of the brush.

The young outlaw was clad in overalls, blue shirt, high-heel boots and a sombrero.

The handcuffs were gone, and a black-handled Colt gun swung along his right thigh. Dyson gasped sharply. Mary had never seen Steve before, and his appearance had merely startled her for a moment.

"Steve McLeod, eh?" said the lawyer. "Well!"

"Yea-a-ah, that's right, Dyson," smiled Steve. "Lookin' over the old place, Miss Allard?"

"Why, I—yes, of course," she replied.

"You got my note, didn't yuh?"

"Wait a minute," interrupted Dyson. "I read that note, McLeod. What was the idea of writing her that note, anyway?"

"If you read it, you know the answer, Dyson," replied Steve.

"But I don't know any answer for that note. This ranch isn't worth anything, and you know it isn't. What's your idea in telling Miss Allard not to sell it?"

"I'm lookin' for that answer, too, Dyson. Gus Lane tried to buy this ranch from Hermit Bill, but the old coot got suspicious. Yuh can't blame him, can yuh? Well, my advice to Miss Allard is not to sell."

Dyson shrugged his shoulders. "It's all news to me," he said.

"Aren't you afraid?" asked Mary Allard.

Steve laughed.

Dyson said, "Miss Allard, this man was convicted of murdering your uncle."

"But he never was sentenced," added Steve dryly. "And yuh might tell Gus Lane to keep his bunch of coyotes out of these hills, or they might not come home again."

"I don't know what you mean," said Dyson.

"Gus Lane will. You just tell him I warned him."

"Of course—I'll tell him, McLeod."

"Thank yuh very much. Miss Allard, I'm pleased to have met yuh."

Steve backed into the brush and disappeared. After a few moments Mary Allard and Sam Dyson climbed into the buggy and turned back toward Galena City.

"He doesn't look like a murderer," remarked Mary.

"Well, the jury convicted him, my dear. That's all the proof we need in law. I wouldn't be surprised if he tried to buy the ranch from you. He seems to think it is worth something."

"I wonder why Mr. Lane tried to buy it from my uncle."

"That's imagination on Steve's part. Gus Lane wouldn't pay a cent for the ranch."

"Who would?" queried Mary.

"Nobody. It isn't even range land. You saw it. Worthless stuff."

"You spoke of a price of four hundred dollars, Mr. Dyson."

"Oh, yes—yes, I did. I might be able to sell it for that."

"But," said Mary, "after I paid you your commission—"

"No, no! I wouldn't think of taking a commission. No, I believe I can get you four hundred, net."

"I'll think it over," promised Mary. "I really need money."

"We could close the deal this evening, if you need the money."

"No, I need a little more time to think it over, Mr. Dyson."

"That's all right. Tomorrow will do just as well."

Sam Dyson lost no time in telling the sheriff and marshal about seeing Steve McLeod. Mary Allard met Hashknife and Sleepy at the hotel, and told them about her trip to the ranch. Hashknife was interested in what Steve McLeod had told Dyson about Gus Lane having tried to buy the ranch from Hermit Bill. She asked Hashknife his advice on selling the ranch.

"Don't sell," he advised her.

A little later they met Smoky Summers and the sheriff. Smoky stopped to talk, but the sheriff went on to his office.

"Elmer's upset," Smoky informed them. "The owners of the Lucky Mule, Golden Queen and Yellow Cross mines had a meetin' here today, and they had the sheriff and me in on the talk. They claim that the high-graders are stealin' 'em blind, and they want somethin' done."

"What can the sheriff do?" asked Sleepy.

"Eat three times a day and sleep all night," replied Smoky.

"How is this high-gradin' done?" queried Hashknife.

"I dunno, Hartley. They say that miners are watched all the time. They all wear overalls and jumpers, which they must take off, before they leave, and their lunch-boxes are searched, too. But the owners say it has them worried, because their richest ore is bein' stolen, and they can't find out how it's done."

"How could they dispose of high-grade stuff?" asked Hashknife.

"That's another angle that bothers 'em," sighed Smoky. "Yuh can't jist go out and sell the stuff to anybody."

"How long has this high-gradin' been goin' on, Smoky?"

"About six months, they tell me—mebbe longer."

"And every mine has the same trouble, eh?"

"Yeah, they're all yelpin' about it. The Lucky Mule and the Golden Queen are the richest mines, but the Yellow Cross claims that they are bein' mighty hard hit."

"Who owns the Golden Queen?"

"I dunno who actually owns it, but they say that Gus Lane has a lot of the stock. Mebbe he owns most of it—I dunno. The Lucky Mule belongs to folks in San Francisco. The Yellow Cross was bought seven, eight months ago by a man named Al Leeds. He bought it awful cheap, because it didn't look good. They ain't made a whole lot yet."

"Still," remarked Sleepy, "that don't give us any idea who shot at us—nor why."

"Well, don't ask the sheriff's office to find out," said Smoky soberly, "'cause that takes brains."

"You didn't happen to know Bob Tygard, the feller who jumped off the train near Silver Butte, did yuh?" asked Hashknife.

"No, I didn't know him. We got a notice about it, askin' us to keep an eye out for him. Did you know him?"

"No, I didn't know him. Well, we'll see yuh later, Smoky."

HASHKNIFE and Sleepy spent the evening in the Hondo Saloon, merely looking over the crowd. Slim Watson talked with them, and wanted them to meet Gus Lane.

"Why?" queried Hashknife.

"Oh, I just thought maybe you'd like to know him. He's a big man in this neck-of-the-woods."

"He didn't say he'd like to meet us, did he?" asked Sleepy.

"No, he didn't. I don't reckon he even knows yo're in town."

"Mebbe we better leave it that way," suggested Hashknife. "It makes me nervous to meet big men. Anyway, we wouldn't mean anythin' to him."

"No, I don't reckon so."

Slim drifted away. Smoky Summers joined them and pointed out Tom East and Mac Oertli among the crowd. Business was good, as miners tried to drink the place dry, or to win a stake at faro, roulette or poker. It was about ten o'clock when Hashknife and Sleepy left the saloon.

It was always a habit with them to go to the stable and see that their horses were fed, before going to their room. They walked into the livery-stable, where a lighted lantern hung between the long row of stalls. There was no sign of the stable man, as they walked toward the rear stalls.

Suddenly both men were jabbed sharply in the backs.

"Keep yore hands where they are," warned a husky voice.

Hashknife twisted his head around. The twin muzzles of a shotgun rested against his middle, and the masked man behind the gun said, "Take it easy, or I'll pull 'em both loose."

Sleepy was in the same position. The third man relieved them of their guns.

"Horses ready?" queried one of the men.

"All set."

"What's this all about, boys?" asked Hashknife.

"Aw, shut up!" snapped Hashknife's captor, and slashed the muzzle of the shotgun against the side of his head.

The blow nearly knocked Hashknife to his knees, but he caught the end of a stall and managed to keep his feet. Blood ran from a cut above his right ear, trickling down under his set jaw.

"I owed yuh that one, feller," growled the man. "Now git on that horse, before I knock yore damn head off."

Staggering a little, Hashknife managed to mount his horse. Quickly they roped his feet together under the horse's belly, and tied his wrists to the saddle horn. Sleepy received the same treatment. Then they opened the back door of the stable, and led the horses outside.

"Jist as a warnin'," said one of the men, "you'll keep still. If either of yuh start yelpin, we'll start shootin'. You can't win."

The three men mounted and led their captives around the town, where they reached the road to Silver Butte. There was no conversation, as they galloped along, nothing to indicate where they were going, nor what fate had in store for Hashknife and Sleepy.

They reached the foot of some narrow, twisting grades along a canyon, possibly ten miles from Galena City, when the riders pulled up. It was bright moonlight, but the men were heavily masked. They took the ropes off Hashknife and Sleepy, but kept them covered.

"We're givin' yuh a chance—you two nosey skunks," said one of the men. "Yore trail leads straight north. Don't never come back to this range, or you'll last about as long as a snowball in hell. Now, git goin' and keep goin'."

"Give our regards to Gus Lane will yuh?" asked Hashknife.

The man laughed shortly. "Yeah, shore—I'll tell him. Now hit the grit—and keep on hittin' it."

"Thank yuh very kindly. *Adios.*"

Both Hashknife and Sleepy half expected a load of buckshot in the back, but none came. They galloped up the grade, slowed and looked back, but there was no one in sight.

"Shake 'em up!" ordered Hashknife, and they rode swiftly around two more sharp curves in the road, where Hashknife pulled up, drew off the road against some brush, and began shaking out his rope.

"What's the idea?" queried Sleepy quietly.

"Get yore rope loose, Sleepy. It's a cinch they'll send one man to see that we obey orders. They'll give us a good lead, before he comes."

WITH their loops all built, they hugged the edge of the brush, out of the moonlight. It seemed a long time before they heard the thud of hoofs on the hard road. It was only one horse, and the rider made the turn at a moderate gallop. He didn't see the two riders and had no idea of an ambush, until Hashknife's loop settled around his shoulders, yanking him high out of the saddle.

He came down with a heavy thud in the middle of the road, knocked cold. They examined him by the light of matches, but did not recognize him. His mask was in his hip pocket. In his holster was a heavy Colt .45, and inside the top of his pants was tucked Hashknife's gun.

Hashknife gave Sleepy the man's gun, took his own, lifted the man off the road and braced him against the wall of the grade.

"This is a better gun than mine," was

Sleepy's only comment, as they headed back for Galena City.

They circled around the town and then brought their horses in the back entrance of the stable, where they stabled them. In the tack-room they found the stableman, bound and gagged and partly covered with empty grain sacks.

He was little the worse for wear. He said that three masked men stuck him up, and with no explanation they tied him up and piled the sacks on him. He had no idea what it was all about. The door had been closed; so he was unable to hear any of the conversation.

"I can't imagine what it would be," said Hashknife.

"Hey!" exclaimed the stableman. "You have got blood all down yore neck, and there's a young aig jist above yore ear."

"Splittin' wood and a chunk flew up," replied Hashknife soberly.

"Oh! Well, I've got to go and eat me some food. I've been tied up for two, three hours. Much obliged to yuh, gents."

"Yo're welcome," smiled Sleepy. "If yuh find out who tied yuh up, yuh wouldn't mind tellin' us, would yuh?"

"I'll be proud to tell yuh—yo're danged right."

THE night stage from Silver Butte, which arrived early in the morning at Galena City, brought in George Ellis, foreman of the Lucky Mule Mine. The driver had found him on the road, wandering in a dazed condition, and brought him in. Hashknife and Sleepy listened from the window of their hotel, when the commotion awakened them.

"Them look like rope burns around his shoulders," said the driver.

"Good guessin'," remarked Hashknife to Sleepy. "So it was the foreman of the Lucky Mule. That makes it look different, Sleepy."

"In what way?" queried Sleepy.

"Well, I wasn't expectin' that angle."

The doctor came and ordered the men to carry Ellis down to his house where he could make an examination.

"The man," declared the doctor, "seems to have suffered a shock."

Hashknife grinned slowly. "Doc's right," he said quietly. "I reckon we better dress and get some breakfast. But from now on—look out for storms, pardner."

HASHKNIFE and Sleepy met Mary Allard down in the lobby. She said the commotion around the stage had awakened her, and Hashknife invited her to eat breakfast with them. In the little dining room they saw Sam Dyson and another man eating together. The man had his back to them, and did not turn around.

"I wanted a chance to talk with you," Mary told Hashknife.

"Well, you go right ahead," he smiled. "We've got all the time there is left."

"It's about that ranch. You see," Mary sighed, "when I came here I had very little money. I haven't any left, and unless I sell—"

"Well, that's shore tough," admitted the tall cowboy. "But that will ain't been probated, nor nothin'. Yuh see, they—"

"Mr. Dyson said that could be handled. He will handle the papers, and all I have to do is give him a bill-of-sale."

"I see—Mr. Dyson will do a jugglin' act with the law. How much does he want to pay yuh?"

"Four hundred dollars. And I—I really need the money—badly."

"Yeah, I reckon yuh do," agreed Hashknife thoughtfully. "Kinda funny, though."

"What's funny about it?" asked Sleepy.

"The fact that the land ain't worth anythin'. Did you tell him you'd make the deal, Miss Allard?"

"Well, not exactly. You see, I—well, I can't stay here indefinitely. I told him I would leave here on the stage tomorrow, and if nothing happened before that time, I would sell it to him."

"Uh-huh. Well, you know best. I—"

The man with the lawyer turned his head and Hashknife got a glimpse of his face. It was only a flash, but the tall cowboy's gray eyes widened a trifle. Sleepy saw the expression in Hashknife's eyes, and his brows lifted slightly.

The lawyer was talking earnestly with this man, and neither of them seemed to be paying the slightest attention to the three people across the room. Finally they left the room, but the man did not look around. Hashknife's thin lips twisted in a ghost of a smile, as he watched the two men leave the dining room.

"Do you happen to know the man with Mr. Dyson, Miss Allard?" asked Hashknife.

"Why, yes, Mr. Dyson introduced me to him just before you came down. He is Mr. Leeds, owner of the Yellow Cross Mine."

They left Mary in the lobby and went over to the livery-stable. Poco Salas was at the doorway, waiting for them.

"Steve he ees wan' see you," he said.

"Where's Steve?" queried Hashknife quietly.

"You come to the rancho these evening, I theenk we fin' heem."

"All right, Poco."

The Mexican disappeared through the rear entrance. Hashknife scowled thoughtfully. Sleepy said, "All right—who is Mr. Leeds?"

"Remember the town of Silverado, Sleepy?"

"I shore do. But—"

"Remember a gold thief that got away?"

"Al Hicks?"

"That's the boy—and I'll bet yuh ten dollars *oro Americano* against a 'dobe dollar that Mr. Leeds is Mr. Hicks."

"Are yuh sure, Hashknife?"

"A peso will win yuh ten dollars in gold—if I'm wrong."

"No bet," said Sleepy soberly. "But he's the owner of the Yellow Cross Mine."

"Yeah, that's right—and if my hunch is workin' right, he was one of the three men who rode us out of town last night. Remember one of them sayin' that he owed me that smash on the head with the gun barrel. It had to be somebody who knew me, Sleepy."

"That's right—but I don't get the idea yet."

"Neither do I," admitted Hashknife, "but the darn thing is about to take root. The men who took us out of town will be worried about us comin' back; so keep yore eyes open. We'll talk to Steve McLeod this evenin'—I hope."

"It might be a trap," suggested Sleepy.

"Yeah, it might be, but I don't believe it."

They went to the sheriff's office, where they found Elmer Davidson, the sheriff, and Smoky Summers, the deputy. They had just come from the doctor's office.

"George Ellis seems kinda dazed over the whole thing," said Smoky. "He said he was on his way to Silver Butte, gallopin' along, when somethin' jerked him right out of the saddle. That's all he remembers. He's got rope-burns on his arms and shoulders."

"Damn funny!" snapped the sheriff. "Jimmy Toland, the stableman, says three masked men hopped him last night and tied him up."

"That's right," agreed Hashknife. "We went down to see if he had fed our broncs, and we found him there."

"Yeah, that's what he told me," nodded the sheriff. "Damned if I can figure out any reason for it."

"Any report from Steve McLeod?" asked Sleepy.

"Nobody's seen him," replied the sheriff. "Mebbe he high-tailed it out of the country. No use huntin' for him. If he's around here, we'll get him sooner or later."

"Prob'ly later," said Smoky dryly.

HASHKNIFE and Sleepy saddled their horses and rode out of town about three o'clock in the afternoon, but drew off the road and dismounted about a mile

out of town. With their horses behind the brush, they sprawled in the shade of a live-oak and watched the road for anyone who might follow them. It was the road which led to Steve McLeod's place, and also to Hermit Bill's ranch.

"Somebody ought to trail us," smiled Hashknife. "The sheriff and deputy prob'ly saw us talk with Poco, and they might drop out, just in case Steve McLeod was around. And I believe *Mr. Leeds,* owner of the Yellow Cross, was still in town."

"Do yuh think Mr. Leeds recognized us?" asked Sleepy.

"He didn't have to recognize us—Mr. Dyson told him who we are. He'd sure recognize the names."

"Do yuh figure that Dyson is in some scheme with Leeds?"

"Dyson is out to make money. I know his type, Sleepy. I wish I knew why Dyson wants to buy that ranch from Mary Allard—and why Steve don't want her to sell."

"Mebbe Steve will tell us the answer."

NO ONE came along the road, but they stayed there until dark, before going on to Steve's ranch. Poco was watching at the ranchhouse gate, and took them to the house. Steve was there. Poco went back to the front gate, and Steve invited them in.

There was nothing of the hunted criminal about Steve; he seemed perfectly at ease.

"Ain't you takin' a long chance, livin' here openly and askin' strangers in?" queried Hashknife.

"Well, I keep out of sight most of the time," grinned Steve, "and I don't figure you two as strangers. Yesterday I had a long talk with Elmer Davidson and—"

"Yuh mean—with the sheriff?" interrupted Sleepy.

"That's right," agreed Steve. "Yuh see, Elmer never believed that I killed Hermit Bill—and he does want to know who did."

"Then yore escape was framed, eh?" grinned Hashknife.

"Well, it might be better to say that the sheriff didn't shoot to kill," said Steve.

"How'd yuh get the handcuffs off?" asked Sleepy.

"Well, I'll tell yuh," drawled Steve. "When I stopped goin' real fast, I discovered the key in my pocket."

"So that's why the sheriff ain't been houndin' yuh, eh?"

"Elmer Davidson is my best friend, Stevens."

"Was Smoky in on the scheme?"

"No, we didn't let him in on it, 'cause he might have ruined it. Smoky ain't any actor, and he might have overdone things."

"Steve," said Hashknife, "I'd like to know why yuh wrote that note to Miss Allard, askin' her not to sell that ranch."

"I'll tell yuh why, Hartley. When I was in jail, I overheard a conversation between Dyson, that damn lawyer, and Tom East. Tom is a minin' engineer—or claims he is. They were talkin' about Hermit Bill's ranch, and about a very rich vein of gold ore on the ranch. East said it was worth a million, but they can't locate it because the ranch is patented. Their only chance is to buy it.

"Dyson said that the hermit was too suspicious for that, but he would try to buy it. That's all I heard, but it was enough to make me feel that the girl ought to hang onto the ranch."

"Well," said Hashknife, "that clears up the reason for Dyson wantin' to buy the girl out. You heard about us bein' shot at here, didn't yuh?"

"I was here—down in the hay-loft," smiled Steve. "Know who it was, don't yuh?"

"I believe it was Tom East and Mac Oertli," replied Hashknife.

"I think yo're right. I saw 'em from the cracks in the hay-loft."

"But why would they shoot at us?"

Steve shrugged his shoulders. "They're workin' for Lane."

"Well, that might be a good reason, Steve. Do you know Al Leeds?"

"Not very well. He owns the Yellow Cross."

"You never happened to see any ghosts at Ghost Town, did yuh?"

Steve laughed. "No, I never did. A puncher named Gibson swore that he saw 'em. I never happened to be there at night."

"We got the story from him," said Hashknife. "I'm sorry about that girl, but she told us this mornin' that she's makin' a deal with Dyson in the mornin'. He's payin' her four hundred dollars for the ranch and the few cows. She's broke—flat."

"Gee, I'd hate to see her do that!" exclaimed Steve. "She could get a lot more than that, if there's a rich vein on the place. Yuh see, I've got to prove that I didn't kill Hermit Bill. I believe Gus Lane and his gang killed the old man, tryin' to fix things up so they can get control of that land."

"What about the old man's will?" asked Hashknife.

"Oh, he left the will all right. The sheriff was a witness. It said that all his money and his ranch would go to Mary Allard. The will said that there was about twenty-five thousand dollars in cash, but the money wasn't found. It wasn't in the bank, 'cause Hermit Bill never believed in banks."

"Where did he come from and where did he make his money?"

STEVE shrugged his shoulders. "You know as much as we do about it. When he wasn't cussin' somebody, he kept his mouth shut. Swore that I misbranded one of his calves, and had me arrested for it. It made me so mad that I told him in the courtroom that I was goin' to take his scalp the first time I had a chance. That was my mistake."

"Had the calf been misbranded?" asked Sleepy.

"Yeah, it had—and it wasn't weaned yet. No sane cowman would do a thing like that—and the judge said he thought I was sane."

"When was the last time you seen Hermit Bill alive?" asked Hashknife.

"The night before he was killed. He was in Silver Butte. I remember it well, 'cause it was the night that a prisoner jumped off a train just outside the town."

"Bob Tygard?" queried Hashknife.

"That's the feller. Several of us went out with the marshal, but we didn't find him.

"I saw Hermit Bill in a saloon, just before we heard about it. I stayed there all night, but I didn't see him again. I came back here next day, and that night Hermit Bill was killed. But I didn't kill the old pelican."

"No, I don't reckon yuh did, Steve," agreed Hashknife.

"Have yuh got any idea who did kill him?" asked Steve anxiously.

"Not yet. I wish I knew more about Hermit Bill's past."

"Well, I can tell yuh this much—he was plenty salty."

"But what about the girl?" asked Sleepy. "She's about to take that four hundred dollars. Yuh can't blame her—bein' broke thataway."

"I'll tell yuh what to do," suggested Steve. "I've got fifty dollars that ain't workin'. You take it to her, and tell her to use it, sort of like a loan. Mebbe she can hold off a while. Hell, I don't want her to throw away a fortune."

"Well, if yuh want to do that," said Hashknife. "Fifty dollars ought to last her a long time in Galena City, livin' like she does."

Steve gave Hashknife the money, and they went back to Galena City. It was still early in the night; so they went to the hotel to give Mary Allard the fifty dollars.

"I ain't seen her and I don't know where she's at," declared the hotel-keeper. "She et her supper and said she was

a-goin' out for a little walk, but she ain't come back yet."

"How long ago was that?" asked Hashknife.

"Oh, mebbe three, four hours ago."

Hashknife rubbed his chin thoughtfully. There was a possibility that Mary had stopped at someone's home and would be back later.

"We'll set down here for a while," he told Sleepy.

A man came in and asked the hotel-keeper if he knew where the sheriff could be found.

They talked quietly for several moments, and after the man went out the hotel-keeper said:

"Trouble at the Lucky Mule. Big robbery, that feller said. One man killed and a lot of gold stole. Seemed all het up over it, too."

"Gettin' excited over a little thing like that," said Sleepy dryly. "Some people are funny thataway."

The hotel-keeper slid his glasses over his eyes and looked reprovingly at Sleepy, but said nothing. Hashknife chuckled quietly, as they walked outside. The sheriff was gathering a posse of several riders, and they headed for the Lucky Mule.

"Where do yuh reckon Mary Allard is?" queried Sleepy.

"She's been gone three or four hours," said Hashknife. "I can't figure out why anybody would molest her. Shucks, she promised to sell that ranch to Sam Dyson tomorrow; so he wouldn't have any reason to harm her in any way. I don't see any reason why she don't come back."

THEY went over to the Hondo Saloon, where they found Sam Dyson. Gus Lane was not around, and the place was doing little business.

"You don't happen to know where Miss Allard can be found, do yuh?" asked Hashknife.

Dyson looked quizzically at the tall cowboy. "Isn't she at the hotel?" he asked.

Hashknife shook his head. "She's been gone three or four hours."

"Gone? Gone where?"

Hashknife shrugged his shoulders. *"Quien sabe?"*

Dyson insisted that they go to the hotel again. He seemed greatly perturbed over the girl's absence. But she was not in her room, and the hotel-keeper reiterated that he "didn't have no damn idea where she'd gone. Anyway, it wasn't his business."

"Might as well take it easy," suggested Hashknife. "Mebbe she's visitin' somebody here in town."

Dyson grudgingly consented, and went back to the Hondo. It was midnight when the posse came back to Galena City, but Mary Allard had not returned. Smoky Summers told Hashknife that several masked men had forced their way into the main office at the Lucky Mule, forced the man in charge to open the safe, and had taken five hundred ounces of raw gold. A watchman tried to stop them, as they left the building, and was shot down. Beyond

the fact that they were masked, there was no description.

After Smoky left them, Hashknife led the way to the stable, where they saddled their horses. Sleepy did not ask why nor where, until they rode from the rear of the stable, and were well away from town.

"We're goin' to Ghost Town," replied Hashknife.

"What for?" queried Sleepy. "Ain't things bad enough without stirrin' up a ghost or two?"

"I don't know *what* we'll stir up," retorted Hashknife, "but I've kinda got a hankerin' to look the old place over in the moonlight."

"Yeah? Well, you know what happened to Gibson. He never even waited to take his horse along. Personally, I've never hankered for ghosts."

"You don't believe in 'em, do yuh?"

"Well, I won't say that I can't be convinced. There's an awful lot of things that we don't understand, Hashknife."

Hashknife laughed quietly. "The dead don't come back, pardner."

"If I ever see a ghost, neither will I—as far as that goes."

At the forks of the old road was a rickety sign, weather-beaten, sagging on one rusty nail, the crude lettering nearly obliterated. It said GHOST TOWN TWO MILES.

The road was narrow and winding, nearly grown up with weeds and desert growth. It was bordered by Joshua-palms, juniper trees, with here and there a giant saguaro, poking its rounded spire high above the rest of the vegetation.

Ghost Town was the original Galena City, when the first mines were discovered and was a roaring camp until the mines played out, and a rich strike, far to the north, caused everyone to desert the place. Later the present town of Galena was founded, taking away the identity of the deserted town, which was named Ghost Town.

The main street was about four blocks long, narrow and crooked with frame buildings on each side. There were other buildings, too, straggling away from the main street, but much of the useable lumber had been torn off the frames and carted away. However, Main Street was fairly complete, as to buildings, but the desert had moved in, and Main Street was mostly sage, cactus, cat-claw and other spined varities of desert growth. It was a real ghost town, where not a soul lived, except families of pack-rats and an occasional rattler, centipedes and scorpions, not to mention spiders.

Hashknife and Sleepy had never been there before. They tied their horses near the old road and walked into the town, going carefully in the moonlight, which cast grotesque shadows from the old buildings. Near the center of the south side was a three-story hotel building, porches sagging, windows gone. On one side was a stairway, leading up to each story, like a fire-escape, but it dangled away from the wall now, held only by the nails in the upper landing.

They came in under the heavy shadow of a rickety porch across the street from the old hotel. Hashknife squeezed Sleepy's arm, and they both hunched quickly. Something or someone was moving across the street. They heard the creak of a boot-sole on old wood, and saw a movement.

"Ghosts don't wear boots," whispered Sleepy.

Finally they saw a man move into the moonlight, where he stood for a long time, as though listening. The man wore a flat-crown sombrero, and the moonlight flickered on the silver-mounted hat-band.

"Looks like Steve McLeod," whispered Hashknife. "His type of hat."

Slowly the man moved along the front of the old hotel until he disappeared into the heavy shadows at the far end.

"Shore dressed like Steve," agreed Sleepy. "Listen!"

From somewhere came the sound of a sharp cry, which was not repeated. After listening a long time Hashknife said:

"Owl—mebbe. Might have been some night-bird, but it sounded like a human voice."

"Whatever it was," whispered Sleepy, "it shore gave me a fine mess of goose-pimples. Fact is, I've been more or less pimply ever since I seen this street. I can't even spit."

"Yuh don't have to spit, do yuh?" asked Hashknife soberly.

"Ain't it a good thing I don't?"

"Sh-h-h-h!" warned Hashknife.

From somewhere along the street came the thin, eerie creak of something that sounded like a rusty wheel, badly in need of oil. It was more of a whine than a creak. But they were unable to decide from which direction the sound came. They crouched there in the shadow for about fifteen minutes, and heard the sound repeated several times.

"If that's a ghost," said Sleepy, "it's shore got rheumatism."

"Sounds like a rusty pulley," whispered Hashknife.

"Personally," said Sleepy, "I'm beginnin' to believe Gibson—and I'm sober."

"Let's move further down the street," suggested Hashknife. "Keep close to the buildin's and move mighty slow."

But as they started on, Hashknife again grasped Sleepy's sleeve, stopping him short. Into the streak of moonlight in the center of the street, and about a hundred feet away, walked a packed, gray burro. The strip of moonlight was not over a dozen feet across, and they saw six of the packed burros cross in single file. There was not a sound.

"Don't tell me that dead burros come back!" whispered Sleepy.

"Stay here and watch," whispered Hashknife. "I'm goin' to follow that burro train."

Then he moved back a few steps and went quietly through a narrow space between two of the sagging buildings behind them. Sleepy sagged in beside the old wall and wished for a cigarette. Somewhere a screech-owl sounded its cry, and back in the hills a coyote yapped mournfully at the moon.

"And me already covered with goose-pimples," whispered Sleepy.

Hashknife had been gone about thirty minutes, when Sleepy heard the stealthy approach of a man. He thought it was Hashknife, and the man was almost against him, when he was able to see that the man was many inches shorter than his cowboy partner.

The man grunted and banged his shoulders against the old wooden wall, when Sleepy's six-shooter bored into his middle.

"*Que es?*" he whispered huskily.

"Who are you?" asked Sleepy.

"Poco. Poco Salas."

"Poco, eh? This is Stevens. What in hell are you doin' here?"

"I look for Steefe."

"Oh, yo're lookin' for Steve, eh?"

"I cross hees heart, you hope I die."

"Hunch down here, Poco. What about Steve?"

"I don't know leetle beet," replied Poco, hunched down beside Sleepy. "After you leave the rancho tonight, Steve ees saying, 'We go to ol' Ghos' Town.'

"I am saying, 'W'at the hell ees the rizzon?' and he ees saying you spik 'bout ghos'; so he ees looking for some. I am staying weeth those horse, but w'en he ees not coming back pretty soon, I am 'unting for heem.

"Maybe he ees mad like hell from me now, biccause I'm not weet those horse. W'at the hell you do here, yourself?"

"Lookin' for ghosts, Poco."

"*Madre de Dios*, I am theenk somebody ees gone loco."

"Didja ever see a ghost, Poco?"

Poco reverently crossed himself in the dark.

"I don' know," he whispered. "W'at the hell ees a ghos' looking like?"

"Pardner, you've got me stuck—I dunno what they look like."

"Sure. I wonner w'ere Steefe ees going?"

"Is Steve wearin' a flat-crown black hat with silver band?"

"Sure. You see heem?"

"The last time I seen him he was close to that far corner over there, and I ain't seen him since. He's prob'ly still lookin'."

"Somebody ees coming!" whispered Poco. "Your *amigo?*"

"I shore hope so."

IT WAS Hashknife coming carefully. The low whistle of a mocking-bird told Sleepy who it was, and in a few moments he was beside them, listening to Sleepy's explanation of Poco's presence.

"Man, those burros faded out so completely that you'd almost believe that they were ghosts," he told them. "I saw 'em twice after I left here, but they got away from me on the rim of a canyon out there. Once I spotted' em on an old, dusty cattle-trail in the junipers, and thought I could follow 'em, but they must have left the trail. On the way back I lit a match and looked for tracks, but *there wasn't a burro track in that danged trail.*"

After several moments of silence Sleepy said, "Now do yuh believe in ghosts, Hashknife?"

"No, I can't quite believe in 'em, Sleepy."

"But a live burro always leaves tracks."

"Not if yuh muffle their hoofs in burlap, pardner."

"Are yuh sure they were muffled?"

"'Course, I'm not sure."

"All right—I still believe in ghosts. How about you, Poco?"

"Theese dam place geeve me the creeps."

"Well, I'll tell yuh," drawled Hashknife. "Those burros seem to have crossed the street over at the other side of the old hotel building. Let's mosey over there and see if we can figure out where they started from. Go easy, now."

The three men made their way slowly along, until they were opposite the corner of the old hotel building. There was a fifty-foot space between that wall and the next tumble-down building. Quickly they slipped across the moonlit strip and into the shadow of the hotel wall. There were a few windows in that wall, sans panels, and with the frames smashed out.

Brush grew in against the wall of the building. Poco grunted audibly and then moved quickly ahead, shoving some brush away, as he edged in against the wall. Here was Steve McLeod, bound and gagged. His hair was bloody and he seemed badly dazed from a blow on the head, but was able to walk with assistance, after they had cut away his bonds and gag.

"What in the devil happened to yuh, Steve?" queried Hashknife, after they were a distance away from there.

"Somebody must have hit me," muttered Steve. "Gosh, I dunno. I remember that I caught my foot on a rope, which seemed to have been stretched across the street. I reached down to investigate, and—well, somethin' hit me and I saw a million stars."

"Rope stretched across the street," muttered Hashknife. "I've got it! That's why there wasn't any man with those burros, Sleepy. They had the rope across the street, where a man led 'em across. In that way they seemed to cross by themselves."

"My gun's gone," announced Steve.

"Ghosts don't knock people out, tie 'em up and steal their guns," declared Sleepy. "Hell, I feel a lot better now."

"How did you happen to come out here, Steve?" asked Hashknife.

"Curiosity, I reckon. You boys spoke about ghosts, yuh know."

"Well, that's what brought us, Steve. You didn't hear that the office of the Lucky Mule was robbed of five hundred ounces of gold tonight, and the watchman killed."

"No, I didn't hear that. Did you give Mary Allard that money?"

"Mary Allard," replied Hashknife, "is missin'."

"You mean—somethin' has happened to her, Hartley?"

"She went out of the hotel right after supper, and she wasn't back when we left there. I'm afraid somethin' *has* happened to her."

"Sam Dyson?" queried Steve.

"Why would he harm her?" asked Hashknife. "He wants to buy that ranch from her. No, I don't believe Dyson had anythin' to do with her disappearance."

"If he didn't," said Steve, "it don't make

sense, Hartley. She hasn't had any dealin's with anyone else in this country."

"See what yuh make of this, Steve," suggested Hashknife, and told Steve about the men who forced them out of town, and the roping of George Ellis, foreman of the Lucky Mule.

"Could yuh prove that Ellis was one of the masked men?" asked Steve.

"He had his mask tucked in his hip-pocket," replied Hashknife. "And had my six-shooter tucked inside his waistband. Yuh couldn't ask for more proof than that, could yuh?"

"What's yore angle?" queried Steve.

"My angle is that George Ellis is double-crossin' the owners of the Lucky Mule, and high-gradin' their jewelry ore."

"Ah-hah!" grunted Steve. "Mr. Ellis was on the jury that convicted me."

"Maybe he was one of the men who murdered Hermit Bill," suggested Sleepy.

"Yeah, that's possible, Sleepy. What do we do next?"

"Is yore head feelin' all right?" asked Hashknife.

"My head's all right, but I'm shy one gun."

"What sort of a canyon is just beyond here?" asked Hashknife.

"THAT'S Angel Canyon," replied Steve. "It's a pot-hole, about a mile long and three, four hundred yards wide."

"Deep?" queried Hashknife.

"Oh, I'd say it was about two hundred feet deep."

"Ever see any angels in it?" asked Sleepy dryly.

"Not me," chuckled Steve. "I've heard that a miner said you'd have to have wings to get out of the thing, and somebody named it Angel Canyon."

"No trails into it, eh?"

"No, I should say not. All rock walls. Nothin' down there anyway."

"How far is it from here to the Yellow Cross Mine, Steve?"

"Oh, about two, three miles. There's an easy trail from here, out past the lower end of Angel Canyon."

Hashknife studied the silhouette of the wall of the old hotel. Here and there were the darker spots, indicating the windows.

"Do yuh think there's somebody in that buildin'?" asked Sleepy.

"That's my hunch," replied Hashknife quietly, "Let's walk past the corner."

At about the middle of the building, screened by the sagging old porch, Hashknife said:

"Sleepy, you and Poco stay here and watch this place. Steve will go with me and we'll take a look along the trail to the Yellow Cross Mine. Mebbe yuh better get across the street where yuh can watch the front and that side."

"Suppose we see somebody?" queried Sleepy.

"Use yore own judgment."

"Yeah, fine! I did that once, and yuh should have seen it after I got through usin' it. Go ahead—we'll hold this fort."

Hashknife and Steve went swiftly away, heading for their horses, while Poco and Sleepy crossed the street into the heavy shadows and down the street to where they could watch both front and side of the old hotel building.

"You theenk pretty queek we see something?" whispered Poco.

"Jist between me and you—I hope not."

"Theese damn place mak' me sheever."

"Don't apologize," said Sleepy dryly. "Go right ahead and shiver. In fact, if yuh run short on shivers, I'll lend yuh a few."

"Maybe I'm col'—I dunno," said Poco.

"Ain't neither one of us cold, Poco. Yeah, I know—you ain't scared—yuh just don't like ghosts."

"You are escare, too, Meester Stivvins?"

"Well, I may not be scared now, but I'm sure all ready to be scared. Damned old place! Every place yuh look, yuh see somethin' move."

"W'at're you are looking now?" asked Poco fearfully.

"Wait!" hissed Sleepy. "Look, Poco! That upper window! Nope, it's gone now."

"Madre de Dios! W'at you see?"

"A light. Just a flash, like somebody lightin' a cigarette. Well, that's fine. Ghosts don't smoke—and they don't need lights. Poco, have yuh ever been inside that buildin'?"

"In the daytime—once."

"Do the stairs look solid?"

"Por Dios, I do not remember the stairs. W'at you 'ave on my mind?"

"You stay right here, Poco. I'm goin' to see if I can get up in that buildin' and find the hombre that made the light."

"You are not escared, Meester Stivvins?"

"I reckon my curiosity is the stronger," replied Sleepy. "You stay right here, and I'll make a try at it."

"Suppose you never come back?"

"Never is a mighty long time. If I don't come back in thirty minutes—lemme see-e-e-e."

"I 'ave no watch. You wan' me for guess on the time?"

"Yeah, that's all right."

"If you not back in thirty minutes—w'at I am doing?"

"You better run like hell and find Hashknife and Steve."

"Suppose you get keeled?"

"In that case, I wouldn't be interested in what yuh done. You stay here, until yuh figure I'm not comin' out—and then do yore runnin'."

SLEEPY went back up the street, where a streak of shadow gave him partial concealment, and crossed to the front of the old hotel. The big front door sagged on one hinge, and there was just enough breeze to cause rustling noises inside the old building. Sleepy removed his boots and left them on the broken sidewalk. With his gun gripped in his right hand, he slid through the doorway and stood inside.

Moonlight gave him a certain amount of illumination. Spiderwebs dangled from the ceiling, brushing into his face, as he moved toward the stairway. Dust seemed an inch deep on the old floor, and his sock-clad feet made no sound, except the eerie creak of boards. Sleepy reached the bottom of the stairs and stood there, listening and looking. Finally he lighted a match, cupped it in his two hands and examined the old stairs. There was not a mark on the inch-deep dust to indicate that anyone had mounted those stairs in years.

If there were someone upstairs, it was a certainty that they did not climb those stairs. Spiders had spun their webs across the stairway forcing Sleepy to ward them away with one hand, as he slowly climbed to the second story. Dust settled in his nostrils and he had an overpowering desire to sneeze, so he squeezed and rubbed his nose, as he leaned against the wall, listening for anything that might let him know that some other human was in that deserted building.

But there was not a sound on that second floor. There was no moonlight, because the stairs were at the rear of the building, and what windows there were gave little light. Feeling his way carefully Sleepy found the stairway and began his slow ascent. Near the landing he stopped. Not only was there a musty smell of dust and old lumber, but there was a decided odor of food—onions, especially. Sleepy gripped his gun, all his senses alert now. Somewhere on this floor was the person who had lighted that match. Grasping the rail he mounted the last two steps.

There was a slight sound like a whisper or a sharply indrawn breath, and a moment later something crashed down on

Sleepy's head. He went flat on his face in the dust, not entirely unconscious, but so near it that he was unable to defend himself in any way.

A weight crashed down on him, and he was dimly conscious of ropes being wound around him. Then he was half carried, half dragged along the hall. A door banged open and he was dropped roughly to the floor. He heard the door close, and in a few moments a match flickered in the darkness and a lamp was lighted.

Hands yanked him over, facing the light. Sleepy was fully conscious now, and he looked with narrowed eyes at a masked man, clad in a rough shirt and overalls, and with a rope tied around his waist.

Sleepy closed his eyes and the man swung him around, placing his shoulders against the wall. It was then that Sleepy was able to see about the small room.

On a pile of old sacks and blankets was Mary Allard, bound and gagged, staring at him. Stacked against the end of the room were several small ore sacks, filled and tied, while along the other side of the place were piles of canned goods and supplies of all kinds. Three Winchester rifles leaned in a corner, while belts of ammunition hung on nails along the wall.

"I was layin' for yuh, yuh damn snooper," snarled the masked man.

"I realize that," said Sleepy dryly.

The masked man studied Sleepy for several moments. Then he said, "So yo're the great Hashknife Hartley, eh? Well, damn yuh, you've stuck yore nose for the last time into my business. They said we'd have to git rid of yuh. I told the boys they was damn fools to not have killed the both of yuh, 'stead of turnin' yuh loose and thinkin' you'd pull out. Where's yore pardner?"

"You find out," retorted Sleepy, amused to think that this man had mistaken him for Hashknife.

"Anyway, he don't mean a damn thing—alone," said the masked man.

"The hell he don't!" snorted Sleepy. "Hello, Miss Allard. How are yuh?"

"You didn't expect any answer, didja?" sneered the man. "You don't suppose we'd kidnap a female and not gag her, didja?"

"Why kidnap that poor girl?" queried Sleepy. "It don't make sense."

"No? Well, it makes sense to me."

"Well," sighed Sleepy, "I suppose paper dolls make sense to a crazy person—I dunno. What's the answer?"

"The answer to what?"

"Capturin' me. You don't aim to keep me here, forever, of course."

"Are yuh in a hurry to die?"

"Oh, no, I sure ain't. Just take yore time. Next year suits me fine."

"Well, it won't be next year, yuh can bank on that, Hartley."

THE man sat down on an ore sack and lighted his pipe, which he stuck through a hole in his mask. The black mask covered his head and hung down around his shoulders. An object was rolled up in a corner, and Sleepy asked the man what it was.

"Rope ladder," he replied gruffly.

"I see," nodded Sleepy. "Yuh climb up the outside. That's why no tracks show on the stairs. Pretty clever. What's that thing over there?"

The man puffed slowly on his pipe for awhile. Then he said, "You want to know a hell of a lot, don'tcha? Well, it can't do no harm to tell yuh. That's a pulley on a vise. We clamp it on the winder sill to lower our ore. Also use it to haul up the ore. This is the last place they'd look for a cache of high-grade. But how come yuh snoopin' up them stairs?"

"Saw yuh light a match up in that window. That pulley is a dead giveaway, pardner. From down in the street yuh can hear it creak."

"Yuh can, eh?"

"Yeah. Who socked Steve McLeod over the head down there?"

The man removed his pipe and seemed

to be studying Sleepy closely. Finally he said, "Where's Steve McLeod now?"

"He's gone for help — if yuh must know."

"Gone for help—where?"

"You make a guess," replied Sleepy.

The man placed the lamp on the floor among some of the sacked ore, threw a tarpaulin over it, and went to the window, where he drew aside an inch of the blanket and peered out of the window for a long time. Finally he came back and put the lamp on the rough table.

"I think yo're lyin', Hartley," he said. "Anyway, the boys will be back for the last of the stuff pretty quick. I'll lower the girl and the sacks. Then I'll climb down the ladder and we'll touch a match to this pile of tinder. There's a breeze tonight, and it'll make an ash heap of Ghost Town."

"Takin' the stuff over to the Yellow Cross, eh?" said Sleepy.

The man whirled and came over near Sleepy.

"What do you know about it?" he snarled nervously.

"That's easy. Al Leeds' right name is Hicks, and he's done time for high-gradin'. The rest comes easy, don'tcha realize? Ellis was one of yore gang. When we roped him off his horse, we found one of our guns on him, and also his black mask. You boys ain't even reasonably smart. You cached yore high-grade right here, waitin' to get enough to take over there, where yuh can ship it."

Sleepy was thrilled at his own deductions, but the masked man was not a bit thrilled. In fact he dropped his pipe.

"All right," he said huskily. "Maybe yo're right, maybe yo're all wrong. But what good will it do yuh—now?"

Sleepy shrugged his shoulders. *"Quien sabe?"* he replied. "But it'll mean the end of you and yore gang. Which one of yuh shot that watchman at the Lucky Mule tonight and got away with five hundred ounces of gold?"

"Huh?" gasped the man.

Sleepy repeated the question.

"We ain't been near the Lucky Mule tonight!" he blurted.

"Tell that to the jury," said Sleepy.

"Shot a watchman, eh? Is he dead?"

"Dead enough to hang all of yuh for murder, my friend."

THE man's hands shook a little, as he refilled his dropped pipe. His hands were long and skinny, but powerful.

"I'd like to see yore face," said Sleepy. "Yuh know, I'd hate to be murdered by a man that I never seen."

"Don't let that worry yuh. You've never seen my face; so it won't make any difference."

Sleepy could see the butt of his gun sticking over the edge of the table. If he could only get a hand loose and grab that gun. He tested the bonds, but they were firm. The man really knew how to tie knots. Sleepy could see Mary, who had lain back on the blanket. She was apparently unhurt, and seemed to have been tied up with strips of soft cloth, rather than a rough rope. At least, decided Sleepy, her captors are not brutal enough to cause her to suffer bruised wrists.

The masked man smoked in silence. Occasionally he would go to the window, after masking the light, and peer out for a long time. Sleepy decided that he had been there at least an hour, and was wondering what Poco Salas had done, when the masked man at the window, grunted with evident relief.

"The boys are back," he told Sleepy. "This last load will settle it."

He went to the corner, dragged out the rope ladder and went to the window, where he quickly lowered it, fastening the hooks over the window-sill. The lamp was masked.

"C'mon up—I've got a prize for yuh," the man called quietly.

Sleepy could hear the creak and bite of the hooks, as a heavy weight pulled the

ladder taut. In some way, these men had avoided Hashknife and Steve, and things looked bad for him, unless help came to Ghost Town in a hurry.

Sleepy could hear the rasp of the climbing man against the old clapboards, and the creaking of the taut ropes. The masked man laughed and moved back close to Sleepy.

"You might tell the boys what you told me," he suggested. "They might not wait to cremate yuh alive, you damn snooper."

"At least, I can tell 'em," replied Sleepy calmly.

A pair of hands came up, hooked over the sill, followed by a masked head. Slowly the man came up and slid over the sill. As he reached the floor a six-shooter appeared in his right hand, and the muzzle steadied on the midriff of the other masked man.

"Keep yore hands right where they are," drawled Hashknife's slightly tired voice. "That's sensible."

With his left hand Hashknife jerked off the mask, grinning at Sleepy, but keeping an eye on the masked man.

"Mind takin' the ropes off my pardner?" he asked. "Of course, I'd just as soon bend this gun over yore head; so yuh can —well, yo're sensible, at that."

THE masked man quickly unroped Sleepy, who stretched his arms, picked up the ropes and proceeded to rope his former captor. Then he tore away the mask, disclosing a white-haired man, square-jawed, evil-faced, who glared his hate at them.

Sleepy unfastened Mary's bonds and removed the gag. She was dazed and did not seem to understand that it was really Hashknife and Sleepy. Her jaws were sore and cramped, but otherwise she was unhurt.

"Steve out there?" asked Sleepy.

"Yeah, he's down there with the burros But don't ask him to climb that rope ladder. Of all the nightmares, that's the worst."

"I'll yell to him to come up the stairs, and I'll take the lamp. Didja see anythin' of Poco?"

"No, we didn't see him."

Sleepy called down to Steve to come up the stairs, and met him with the lamp. The gray-haired man glared at Steve, but said nothing.

"Do yuh recognize this whipporwill, Steve?" asked Hashknife.

Steve shook his head. "No, I don't, Hashknife. He looks all fired mad at me, though. There's so many miners that—" Steve's voice trailed off, as he stared at the high-grader. He swallowed painfully and came closer. His eyes shifted to Hashknife, who was grinning widely.

"I'll be a liar—" began Steve. "I'll just be a liar! Hermit Bill Smith, without the long hair and beard! Bill, you old devil!"

"Don't look natural, eh?" queried Hashknife.

"Natural? My God, if it wasn't for that scar above his right eye, and that one on the bridge of his nose—"

"You—you mean that this is my—uncle?" whispered Mary. "My own uncle kidnapped *me?*"

"I dunno if he's yore uncle or not, Miss Allard," replied Steve, "but he's sure Hermit Bill Smith, the man they were goin' to hang me for killin'. Hashknife, you've—you've done somethin' for me. Why, for a moment I thought I was lookin' at a ghost."

"Ghosts," said Sleepy dryly, "don't get haircuts and shaves."

"Well, why don'tcha say somethin', Hermit Bill?" asked Hashknife.

"What's to be said? I reckon I was wrong a while ago. I thought this other man was you, Hartley."

"It's all in the family," smiled Sleepy.

"But who was the man who died in that burned ranchhouse?" asked Steve.

"Bob Tygard, the outlaw who jumped off the train," replied Hashknife. "Hermit Bill picked him up in Silver Butte and

brought him to his ranch, where somebody mistook him for Hermit Bill."

"Who the hell told you?" blurted Hermit Bill. "Nobody knew he came down here?"

"I found part of his handcuffs in the ashes," smiled Hashknife. "Bob Tygard had a pardner years ago, and I figured you was that man. I've just got a hunch that you killed Tygard yourself."

"That's a lie!" snapped the man. "I know who killed him. They shot him in the doorway, and their bullets smashed a kerosene lamp. The damn house was in flames, before they pulled out, and I seen 'em. If you'll turn me loose and give me a gun, I'll get 'em for yuh."

"Sorry, pardner," said Hashknife, "but that's our job. You ducked out, when you knew Tygard was dead, because you was afraid they'd grab you for the killin', and unearth yore past life. Anyway, you and yore gang were gettin' rich on high-grade, and you figured to clean up and get out, thinkin' that without the long hair and long beard, you'd never be recognized."

THERE was an expression of admiration in Hermit Bill's eyes, as he looked at the tall cowboy.

"Al Leeds said you was damn smart, but I didn't believe you was *that* smart, Hartley," he said.

"You mean Hicks, don'tcha?" queried Hashknife. "Well, we've got everybody except George Ellis, and he won't be hard to take."

"You got Hicks and Colvich?" asked Hermit Bill quickly.

"Thank yuh very much," said Hashknife. "We wasn't sure. Yuh see, me and Steve worked in close, while they was unloadin'. Somebody brought word that a big robbery had been pulled off at the Lucky Mule, and that the sheriff and his posse was in the hills. Rather than be picked up by a posse, they decided to lay low tonight; so we picked up their burros and came back—to fool you."

"I already had him fooled," said Sleepy.

"Yeah, you looked like it—all tied up thataway," said Hashknife. "All we've got to do is have the sheriff pick up Hicks and Colvich, along with Ellis—and the high-gradin' is over."

"But," asked Steve, "why did you kidnap Mary Allard, Bill?"

"To keep her from sellin' that ranch to Sam Dyson. I had to block that fool deal. Hell, that ranch is worth a million! Tom East found that gold vein, and they've tried to buy me out. I trusted Dyson. Damn him, he's got twenty-five thousand dollars of mine in his safe."

"He told Hicks of the sale," smiled Hashknife.

"Damn you, yuh know everythin'!"

"You found the gold vein on yore place?" queried Steve.

"I shore did—the day before Tygard was killed. Do yuh think I could let them coyotes euchre this kid out of what belongs to her? Hell, the only thing I could do was to grab her."

"I—I am really grateful," said Mary. "I didn't know, you see. It was awful—not knowing."

"Well, dang it, Mary, I couldn't tell yuh," protested the hermit.

"Let's get out of this place—it shakes in the wind," said Sleepy. "If we ain't got enough horses, we can use them ghost burros.

GUS LANE, owner of the big Hondo Saloon and Gambling House, removed an unlighted cigar from between his lips and looked at the three men seated around his small office at the rear of the saloon. The three men were Sam Dyson, the lawyer, Tom East and Mac Oertli. The saloon was well patronized that night, and the sounds of music and revelry drifted through the thin partitions.

"We've searched the whole damn town and we can't find a trace of that girl," declared Tom East. "We can't even find anybody who seen her."

"All right," said Lane gruffly, "where's Hartley and Stevens?"

"They left town right after they told me about Turner being missing," answered Dyson. "I found that out at the stable. They went out the back way. They'd already been out to Steve McLeod's ranch."

"How do you know that?" asked Lane.

"The man at the stable heard them talking about it."

"What I want to know is where the sheriff and deputy went with that damn Mexican," said Oertli. "He came into town, like the devil was on his trail, got the sheriff and deputy, and they went out of here on the run. Hell, that was more than an hour ago."

"They went north?" queried Dyson.

"Yeah—and they went fast."

"That hasn't anything to do with us," said Lane.

"How do yuh know?" retorted Tom East.

"What else would send 'em out on the run?" demanded Oertli. "They just came in from ridin' the hills. I tell yuh, I don't like it."

"Losin' your nerve, eh?" sneered Lane. "You're as safe as a church, Mac."

"Safe as a church, eh? With Hartley and his pardner around? You make me laugh. Hicks told me a few things about Hartley, and it didn't make me feel any too damn good. I wish we'd left that job alone until we got rid of them two. Elmer Davidson and Smoky Summers are too dumb to figure out anythin', but that Hartley—"

Gus Lane laughed at him, but Oertli shook his head soberly.

"Laugh if yuh want to, Gus—but I'm not laughin'."

"Aw, he can't pile any deadwood on us, Mac," said East. "We're all in the clear. What do you think, Sam?"

Sam Dyson cleared his throat and looked around.

"I'm more interested in finding that girl right now, Tom. I'm not afraid of Hartley. I think he's just a dumb cowboy, who accidently got a reputation. Don't worry about him."

"Well, I dunno," said Oertli wearily. "I suppose we might as well go out and look around again, Tom."

"Good idea," agreed Lane. "Take a drink and get your nerve back."

The two cowboys got up and moved to the door, where they stepped into the saloon. Tom East was in the lead, and he jerked back, bumping Oertli back into the room. East closed the door and turned to Lane.

"Hartley and his pardner are just comin' in the front door," he said.

WHEN Hashknife, Sleepy, Mary Allard, Steve McLeod and Hermit Bill reached the street they ran into the sheriff, deputy and a very excited Poco Salas. Hashknife explained things to Elmer Davidson, the sheriff, who was so confused that he stuck the lighted end of a cigarette into his mouth.

"Of all the damned things!" he blurted. "Hermit Bill alive! Are yuh dead sure it's Hermit Bill? I never seen behind his whiskers."

"It's the old hermit himself," assured Smoky a bit shakily. "I'd know that nose and them eyes. Hyah, Hermit?"

"Go to hell," growled Hermit Bill. "If it hadn't been for this high-pocket saddle-slicker you'd never have spotted me."

"Prob'ly never have even seen yuh," admitted Smoky.

"But about them other high graders," said the sheriff. "You say it's Lewis, Col-

vick and Ellis? Yo're sure of them, Hartley?"

"I ought to be sure—Hermit Bill gave me their names."

"You tricked me, damn yuh!" snorted Hermit Bill.

"Aw, we knew 'em, anyway," said Sleepy.

"If I was you and Smoky," said Hashknife to the sheriff, "I'd ride right over to the Yellow Cross and arrest Leeds and Colvich. Yuh can pick up Ellis later. Be a little careful, 'cause they might put up a fight."

"I hope they do," said Smoky. "C'mon, Elmer."

"We'll see yuh in town," said Hashknife. "This deck of cards ain't all dealt out yet."

Steve took Mary on his horse, and on the way to Galena City, Sleepy said to Hashknife:

"Mary and Steve are talkin' to each other like they'd known each other all their lives."

"Right now," replied Hashknife, "I'm not interested in love. I've got to have a talk with Hermit Bill. He don't seem like a bad old hombre, and he might help us out on a little scheme I've got. He's a danged old thief, of course, but he might listen to reason."

"Don't forget that he was goin' to incinerate me in that old hotel," said Sleepy.

"Well, he didn't; so that takes the curse off him," laughed Hashknife, and spurred in beside Hermit Bill, who was riding double with Poco Salas.

Hermit Bill listened to Hashknife's scheme.

"Yuh can do as yuh like about it, Bill," said Hashknife, after telling the elderly man about his scheme, "but if yuh don't, yuh might have to face a murder charge. I feel that you didn't kill anybody—but I'm not a Galena City judge and jury."

"I'll do it," agreed Hermit Bill. "It's a crazy idea, just the same."

HASHKNIFE and Sleepy walked up near the end of the Hondo bar. The saloon was partly filled, and several people looked quizzically at Sleepy's dust-grimed face. Colvich and the man who called himself Al Leeds were watching a faro game. Hashknife glanced sharply at Sleepy. It was evident that the sheriff had gone on a wild goose chase to the Yellow Cross Mine. However, it was only a short ride from the mine to Galena City.

Hashknife saw Tom East and Oertli come from Lane's office and approach the bar. In a few moments Sam Dyson and Gus Lane came from the office. Dyson came past the bar, saw Hashknife and Sleepy and came to them, a smile on his face.

"Any news about Miss Allard?" he asked anxiously.

"I was just goin' to ask you the same question," replied Hashknife.

Dyson shook his head quickly. "No news at all. I believe we should notify the sheriff, Hartley. Something must have happened to the young lady."

"I reckon the sheriff is on the trail of the men who pulled that job at the Lucky Mule. Didja know that the watchman lived long enough to tell that one of the men rode a pinto horse?"

Dyson's eyes widened a little. "A—a pinto horse? He—why, no, I didn't know that. Still, there are many pinto horses—I suppose."

"Not around here," said Hashknife soberly, "and you know it."

"I—I know it?" Dyson's depreciating smile was a grimace. "Why, what would I—?"

Sam Dyson was half facing the back of the room, as he talked with Hashknife. Suddenly his tongue failed to function, and all the color drained from his lean face. Between them and the back entrance, standing in the smoke-hazed light of the room, was Hermit Bill, while close behind him stood Steve McLeod. Hermit Bill, long, white whiskers and all, stand-

ing there, staring at the three men against the bar.

A woman screamed, and every sound in the room ceased. A stack of poker chips upset as a nervous hand brushed them aside.

Every patron in the Hondo Saloon saw a ghost. The room was silent for a space of several moments. Then Sam Dyson whirled to head for the front doorway, but Sleepy hooked a toe around his ankle, and the Galena City lawyer crashed down on the floor.

Tom East and Mac Oertli had not moved a muscle. Even when Dyson crashed down they were unable to tear their eyes away from that apparition of Hermit Bill. Suddenly Oertli choked and flung out a hand. The suspense was too much for him, and he started away from the bar. Anything to get away from that *thing*.

TOM EAST was suddenly galvanized into action. His gun flashed up in his right hand.

"You old devil!" he half screamed. "Yo're dead, damn yuh! We killed yuh once, but I'll—"

Hashknife's .45 shook the lights, and Tom East was knocked sideways, his gun blasting a hole in the ceiling. Mac Oertli tried to dive past Sleepy, but Sleepy's gunbarrel slashed him above the right ear, and he went down, sprawling into Sam Dyson, who had been trying to get up for several moments.

But Tom East still had strength enough to shoot again, even if he was down against the bar-rail, and Hermit Bill went staggering backwards. The next moment Hashknife dived into East and wrested the gun from his hand. There was a commotion at the front door, as Leeds and Colvich tried to get out, only to run squarely into the sheriff and deputy. They threw up their hands and capitulated.

Steve McLeod had Gus Lane backed against the bar, Hermit Bill's six-shooter shoved deeply into the gambler's midriff. It was all over in the space of seconds. The crowd had backed away, giving plenty of room for the participants. With their prisoners handcuffed, the sheriff came up to the bar.

Sam Dyson was sitting up on the floor, protesting his innocence with every breath, but no one paid any attention to him. Someone ran to get the doctor, and Hashknife knelt down beside Hermit Bill, whose cotton whiskers had been brushed aside.

"Bring Dyson," whispered the old man. "Got to see him."

Still protesting his innocence, Dyson was dragged over to the old man, staring wide-eyed at the cotton whiskers.

"Yo're a dirty crook, Dyson," whispered Hermit Bill. "You've got twenty-five thousand in yore safe. I've kept it all these years for Bob Tygard. It was his share of the robbery. Bob's gone now. East and Oertli killed him, thinkin' he was me. I won't last long. That money has got to go back to the people it belongs to. Mary will have plenty. Map in my pocket of the mine. The high-grade is all there in Ghost Town and at the Yellow Cross. I—guess—that's—all."

Hashknife got slowly to his feet. "The doctor will be too late," he said quietly. He turned to Dyson and said:

"Where's the five hundred ounces of gold your gang stole at the Lucky Mule tonight, Dyson? You might as well talk, 'cause we've got yuh cold."

"In my safe," whispered the frightened lawyer. "Gus Lane's got Hermit Bill's money in *his* safe."

"You dirty coward!" snarled Gus Lane. "They couldn't prove anything. You've put a rope around your own neck."

"They—knew," replied Dyson. "They knew who pulled the job. That watchman saw Tom's pinto. We couldn't—"

"Pinto?" whispered Mac Oertli. "He didn't ride no pinto on that job."

Hashknife laughed shortly. "It must have been a horse of a different color," he said.

He and Sleepy walked outside, where they found Poco Salas.

"*Por Dios* and my gosh sakes!" he blurted. "I am never seeing anything like you in your whole lifetime—do you suppose.

"You mak' firs'-class ghos' from old Beel and everybody ees escare from your life. Then I am seeing Steve ron like hell from the saloon, and I am thenking he ees escare, too, but he ees meeting those senorita een the hotel. I cannot see w'at he ees saying from her, but he kees her t'ree, four time, hard he can blow!"

Hashknife looked at Sleepy and then scratched his chin thoughtfully.

"I reckon we might as well get the horses," he said. "Everybody around here seems to be slightly upset."

Sleepy nodded and they went toward the hitch-rack.

"We'll pick up the war-sacks and head west," said Hashknife. "I've been lookin' at that range of blue-colored mountains out thataway for a couple days—and yuh never can tell what's on the other side, Sleepy."

"Not until yuh get there," said Sleepy.

DARK WINGS

By WILLIAM BYRON MOWERY

"CRIPES, Jack, don't climb any higher. I'm feeling woozy now."

Jack pointed at the altineedle, quivering on fourteen thousand. "We go on upstairs, Doak. I cross this coast line at fifteen thousand or better. You never know when there's a Patrol plane or boat down there."

"Well, would it kill any cats if there was?"

Jack was busy at the moment. Holding the swift, six-place Diomede to its steady climb, he searched ahead and down, past the nose of his plane. Night was falling. He could barely distinguish the mainland and mangrove keys from the even-blackish Gulf beyond.

The flashing of Great Ark light a dozen miles north gave him his position; he was hopping the fence exactly pat with his flight plan.

He answered Doak. "Would it kill any cats? It'd kill this cat. Honest planes don't slip across empty coasts at dark and fade into the Caribbean. If the Patrol ever glimpsed me at this maneuver, they'd wonder what goes on. When that happens, I get back to growing grapefruit and beans."

"Aren't scared of those Patrol monkeys, are you?"

"A nitwit like you wouldn't be."

"All right, all right. Don't snap a fellow's head off. You must be eating dynamite these days, the load you're carrying."

Through the owl dusk Jack estimated that the mainland shore was nine miles ahead. Easing the stick forward, he throttled down very gradually, and finally cut the motor. To anyone downstairs it would sound like an ordinary distance fadeaway.

The plane began its silent, twelve-mile glide across the danger zone, the patrolled coast.

Jack had perfected that fence-hopping technique months ago. If he climbed high enough for a long glide he could not be heard; if he crossed in darkness he could not be seen. To keep his neighbors from getting suspicious, he always took off from his Lake Chantra farm during daylight; but by starting in the shank of the evening and juggling the minutes carefully, it was no particular trick to arrive over the coast at nightfall.

"Say, Jack"—Doak had a gift for bringing up subjects that made a guy wince—"who was the military-looking coot who visited you this afternoon?"

"That coot," Jack said, in his clipped

Honest Planes Don't Slip Across Empty Coasts at Night and Fade into the Caribbean

way, "was Fred Markham, the Patrol's big shot, Tampa."

Doak's mouth fell open. His face would have made Jack grin, in another mood. It had always been a mystery to Jack how a big awkward guy like Doak could be Shawna-Lee's brother. Of course Doak was a good egg, and capable enough in his line, which was growing winter beans; but as brother to Shawna-Lee he was a lumbering goose hatched out of the same nest with a gyrfalcon of the clouds.

"Patrol's b-big shot!" Doak gulped. "Holy h-hell, those monkeys must be hep to you, Jack."

"No. It's like this. Markham and my dad built twin spreads there on Lake Chantra a long time ago. Mark got out of citrus and went with the Immigration, but he and Dad were always one-two. He's written me several times since Dad died. So I think he's just happened to be passing Chantra and dropped in."

"I see. Hmmm. Old-time partners. That's an insurance policy for you. If you ever get tabbed, Markham 'ud quash—"

"A hot icicle he would! That outfit don't play quash. The cane you ring is the cane you get, with them."

THE mainland shore swam under keel. Glancing occasionally at his air speed to stay on the safe side of a stall, Jack scrutinized the dark carpet below. Not that he expected to see anything. But, more times than he cared to think about, he had been saved by his constant vigilance against the unexpected.

Up toward Great Ark he noticed a twinkle of lights a mile out in the open Gulf. The assembly didn't look like boat lights. Besides, the craft was doing a hot clip for a boat. He studied it, uneasy. There was a faint linger of pink in the high sky; his plane was only a silent dust-fleck in that afterglow, but keen eyes down there might have spotted him.

He reached a night glass from an overhead rack. "Give a look, Doak." He pointed out the twinkle.

Doak focused the glass. His mouth fell open again. "Coast Guard crate! Coming upstairs right at us!"

"Unkink. You go up and down worse than a cork." As Jack glanced around the horizon and laid plans, he made up his mind that this trip, Doak's first with him, would also be Doak's last. His prospective brother-in-law got on his nerves. What with Shawna-Lee's sickness, the farm debts, and Markham's visit, all piled on top of the accumulated strain of his game with the Patrol, his nerves were carrying voltage enough.

"Wake up," Doak yelped, "and start hauling freight!"

Jack had already steepened his glide for speed and kicked the plane around to the southeast. Twenty miles down coast hung a big area of stratus, about ten thousand feet high and stretching toward Key West. "To haul freight," he told Doak, "we need a motor. Get to spinning that inertia."

Through his door panel he looked down and back at the twinkle. It was coming upstairs, no doubt about that. Climbing for a look-see at the Diomede.

"All right, Doak," he said, when the inertia whine sounded high enough. The warm motor caught at a touch of the button. He nursed the throttle up to fast cruising and leveled out.

Trim and speedy, the Diomede easily dropped the seaplane behind. The twinkle dimmed. Just before tearing into the stratus, Jack turned for a last look. The lights had vanished.

A BLIND woolly blackness closed around the plane. Through a pinhead crack a cold little dribble of mist streamed past the glow of the instrument panel, like a taut white string. Jack watched his needles. Doak, his courage recovered, shook hands with himself.

"That's giving 'em the old slip-o, old Jack old boy. And a dose of headwinkum.

Just an innocent sport-fisherman plane heading for Key West and having a bit of motor trouble!"

Jack flew on through the soup, paralleling the coast line. After eating a sandwich, Doak leaned back contentedly, switched on the radio and picked up a song, a hit sweeping the Caribbean like a fire in the sugar canes.

Tee-kee-tee-kee Tah! Tee-kee Tah!
Que-que-reee-daah . . .

He saw the gathering expression on Jack's face and hastily cut the song off. "Wonder what the wild short waves are saying," he mumbled, thumbing the buttons. "Jack, here's that new Madrid station you and Shawna talk about. Want it?"

Jack nodded. Out of the snarling of Old World capitals a voice was coming across to Latin America. It was crisp military Spanish, haranguing. Jack listened with a scowl that deepened to an explosive "Bilge!"

"No spik," Doak said. "What's he dishing out?"

"A line about resurrecting the glory of the Spanish race. That glory-resurrecting over there is getting to be a disease. The next thing, Greece will catch it. Then the Medes and the Persians. If they'd quit digging up their dead grandpas and try to build a decent future for their kids—"

"You should kick; you're cashing in on their rough-housing."

Jack said, "If that was a crack at me, save your breath. I don't see any halos when I shave. Get yourself a swing band and let me navigate."

Twenty minutes after entering the stratus, he swung southwestward. When the plane finally emerged from the weather area, the Florida shore was far behind, the dark-silver carpet of the Caribbean shark waters lay two miles below. Jack figured on a pad and corrected his flight plan for Los Santos, three hundred and eighty miles down the night sky.

In the monotony of motor thrum and Doak's swing band, his thoughts drifted back to that afternoon, when he and Markham sat on the old veranda looking out upon Lake Chandra. Word by word he went over everything Mark had said. It wasn't much. Chiefly they had talked about a white-horned beetle which had broken out in an up-state truck district and was threatening to develop into as bad a scourge as the Medfly.

No question about it, Mark had been friendly. He hadn't come to snoop. He was utterly without suspicion. That's what made his visit hurt—his kindliness, his fatherly "Jack, boy."

Jack tried to kick his thoughts into a pleasanter groove. He sat beside Shawna-Lee's bed, back at Chantra, confessing to her the dark woods he was in:

"Honey, it would have been so easy for us to get married last year when I got out of Tech and came back to Dad's floundering old farm. A boat row across the lake, and you'd have been in my home. But I had a rag of pride and common sense. I couldn't hand you bankruptcy as a wedding gift. And that so-called estate had to be lifted out of its mire of debts. I wanted to be reasonably sure of a living for you and me and our children. Those debts hung heavy."

"I know, Jack." She squeezed his hand understandingly. "And they weren't your debts. You took on a burden of the past."

"Yes. Then I set myself up a day when I could bring you across the lake. We had to be out in the clear. That would have taken an eternity, or so I thought, with gang plows. So I bought the Diomede, and— Well, our day isn't far off now."

That was one solace to Jack. Their day was coming nearer every time he hopped the fence at night and returned with a pay load. From the beginning he had done well, even though handling Orientals and Mediterraneans at a hundred dollars a head. Now, the Sugar Islands jammed with refugees from mid-Europe and Spain,

he was getting five hundred a head, two thousand a flight. That was money. A month or two more, if his luck and nerves held out—

Doak charged into his thoughts. "Who's on the passenger list for tonight, Jack?"

"Two Spaniards and a Vienna couple."

"Wonder where Dekker's been shunting these people."

"I don't know or care. When I land 'em on Chantra and load 'em into his cars, my grief is over. Getting 'em north is his grief."

"D'you suppose Dekker's outfit would squeal on you if they got nailed?"

"You think of the damndest things to think about! Dekker's a rat. Naturally, he'd squeal; he'd bump anyone, if it helped Dekker. Now dry up."

DOAK subsided, temporarily. Far-away northeast a dim glow on the horizon drew Jack's eyes. Whether some freak phosphorescence, a burning tanker, or the night lights of Havana, he could not tell. As he gazed at the glow his thoughts went on beyond to Matanzas and old Camaguey, St. Kitts and Morgan's Isle and Rio Lu. That honeymoon trip seemed as distant to him as the cold stars. He was making the grade, swiftly; yet the conviction was growing on him that this groove was leading him to a crack-up. He was not afraid of the Patrol, or his ugly associates, or of physical dangers such as the shark waters. He was afraid of himself. Of the glooms that came over him like violent sickness. He believed he had lost out fatally in Shawna-Lee's esteem. His own fine, bumptious pride was a memory.

He was telling himself those days: *What if I do win? It'll be on a foul. When I faced a bad jam, I wasn't man enough to stand up and slug it out. I'll always know this. She won't forget it. I thought I could take a dip into this business and then quit clean. It isn't that way. It won't wash off that damned easy.*

"I'll tell you what, Jack"—it was Doak again, with his gift of jabbing a knife into a person—"when we get back home I'm going to can Doc Emmly and call in some other doctor. That coot can't even guess what's wrong with Shawna. I'm worried about her."

"Let Emmly alone," Jack snapped. "He's on his toes. Sure he doesn't know what the trouble is. But he's man enough to say so, instead of making a pop diagnosis."

"Well, I don't intend to sit around twiddling my thumbs and let her get worse and worse every day."

Jack outshouted him. "Neither do I! If she isn't better in twenty-four hours, I'm flying her to Johns Hopkins. That's Emmly's advice. Now tune out."

There was not much talk after that. They passed over the main steamer lane in the lower Straits. Nearing the Vuelta Abajo, Jack began picking up the lights of Cuban fishing schooners. Then, to his left, he spotted the thirty-second beacon he'd been watching for, twenty miles north of his goal. Under other circumstances he would have been proud of hitting the bull's-eye across three hundred and eighty night-miles, through weather and without beam.

He revved down. "You might help keep an eye out," he said to Doak. "No navigation lights in that mangrove hole. Zuela and I have a private arrangement. If it's safe for me to come in, you'll see two green lights with a red in the middle. If not safe, two reds and a green."

"Okay." Doak reached for the night glass. "Ever have any trouble on this end, Jack?"

"No. Zuela is a smooth rattler. This hole is obscure, and I think he also passes out *chivo* to the right parties."

"Where does he collect these people from?"

"His pilot sharks feed 'em to him."

Doak pointed. "There's your glimmers. Straight in front. Two greens and a red."

"Thanks. Hook your belt." He pushed

the stick hard forward. "Keep a watch for boats in the bay. They scoot around down there without the traffic gumption of lucky-bugs. Piling into one as we land wouldn't be funny."

The loping phosphorescence rose up to meet the plane. At five hundred feet Jack circled his landing area to make sure it was free of boats, then slanted down and leveled. The float heels touched, caught; the plane fish-tailed to a neat stop two hundred yards from the pier-end lights.

While Doak tossed out the little anchor, Jack signaled the shore with a flash.

A low-slung motorcraft danced out toward the plane. Jack stood on a pontoon, waiting.

As the boat nosed alongside he caught the rope thrown him, looped it around a strut, and stepped aboard.

There was no light on the boat. A man's dark figure, a deceptive languor about him, got up from the wheel seat. He spoke in Spanish.

"Once again. Good." He noticed Doak. "Is there someone with you?"

"Skip it; he's all right."

Zuela handed him a little sheaf of bills. "For these four tonight. On Wednesday night I'll have two men only but of high pay."

"Don't plan on me for Wednesday," Jack said, thinking of Shawna-Lee. "I'll have Dekker radio you when I can come." He counted the money. It was twenty one-hundreds, American. "All right. Tell them to get into my crate."

The two Spaniards had come up behind Zuela. Jack flipped his flashlight on them. They looked to him as though they might be Loyalist officers. Their handsome clothes and monogrammed kits indicated they were much better heeled than the average refugee. Zuela could be choosey about his customers those days, with all that flood to draw from.

"Have the goodness," Zuela told the Spaniards, "to lift the Señor Kurt into the aeroplane."

The request struck Jack as odd. "Lift?" he repeated. "What's the idea, Zuela?"

"The Señor Kurt has a slight malaise."

Jack flared up. "Haven't I told you to quit loading sick people onto me? Dekker's been kicking, too. You'd handle a mummy if he paid. This time it's no dice with me."

"Perhaps," Zuela said, "this will reconcile our opinions." He held a thousand-dollar bill in the beam of Jack's flash. "The Señor and Señora Kurt have paid well; they have five friends of even better pay to follow."

The bill woke Jack's suspicions. It wasn't Zuela's habit to be so ready with money that size.

He brushed past Zuela. "I'll have a look at what you call 'a slight malaise.' That Czech three weeks ago had an 'inconsequential illness,' and he died on Dekker in St. Augustine."

ON THE stern deck a woman was lying back in a lounge chair. She was about thirty and extraordinarily pretty, though her face was queerly flushed. Like many of the wanderers, she had turned most of her funds into jewels. Not from ostentation but stark necessitude, she was wearing diamonds two deep on every finger. The rings were so tight, intentionally so, that her fingers were puffed; nothing short of a cold-chisel could have got the diamonds off her hands. That was how she had brought the jewels through all the cutthroat vicissitudes since Vienna.

Then Jack's light fell upon her husband, and Jack swore. With a mosquito bar over him, the man lay prostrate in a chair beside her. Desperately sick, he was muttering and tossing in delirium. His wife's voice, her fingers twining with his, seemed to quiet his pain and beat back the dark wings hovering over him.

Jack looked again at the woman. She tried valiantly to smile and appear well, but she too was in the clutch of some sickness, at an early stage. He noticed

the peculiar blueness of her lips, and the splotchy hectic red of her cheeks.

He turned on Zuela. "Come clean; what's the matter with these people?"

"It's only the N'longo fever, and of no danger to you," Zuela said. To the bill he was still holding he calmly added another. "The fever is transmitted by the bite of a mosquito alone."

Jack was dumfounded. Only the N'longo fever. *Only that!* He knew a little about the sickness; enough to make his skin crawl. It was not plague-deadly, but it spread like fire, it prostrated whole communities where it hit. Refugee brought from some corner of the earth, it had exploded on one of the Windwards a year ago, and was breaking out devastatingly in a hundred holes like Los Santos.

"Only!" he lashed at Zuela. "You ought only to be shot, *cabrónny,* for not keeping these two in rigid quarantine."

The epithet got under Zuela's hide. Jack was too furious to notice. "If you think I'll take these people into the States, you're crazy." He tried to hold himself in, but the dammed-up strain of months was giving way. "I'm a fly-by-night, a small-potato angel shark, but I'm not a mass killer. Tonight I go back empty."

Doak had stepped aboard and come aft, with a flash. "What's the hitch, Jack?" Then he saw the two bills in Zuela's hand and the sheaf of hundreds sticking out of Jack's pocket, and his eyes bulged. "Cripes—lettuce—four thousand bucks! Take it, Jack."

"Keep out of this."

With an effort the woman got up, so shaky that Jack reached out and steadied her.

"Would you leave my hoosband here—to die? In your land we have friends. He will become well again; he and I will live again. American, I beg—take us."

Jack could not look into her eyes. She was in no wise pleading for herself. Her plea was at once a mother's bottomless devotion and a wife's cry for her lover. It came home to Jack that Shawna-Lee was of her kind and that he had been wrong in believing otherwise. Shawna would beg for him like this.

He stood mute, feeling like an executioner. Those two had come through hardships, and were sick. To turn them back now, a couple of hours from their haven, seemed a Zuela trick.

The taller of the Spaniards touched his shoulder. The man's voice packed a threat. "My companion and I have paid. We must go." Jack saw the outlines of a belt dagger beneath the man's light-blue tunic. "We show no sign of the N'longo. Refuse passage to these two, if you wish, but Metges and I'll get what we paid for or take it forcibly. If compelled, *I* can pilot that aeroplane."

Zuela whipcracked, "All the four of you are going!" He stepped up against Jack, and Jack noticed a jeweled automatic in his hand. "Do me the favor to recover from your nonsense immediately."

They ringed Jack about, each with his own narrow slant on the business; the Spaniards, Doak, the woman, and Zuela with the gun. There was chaos in Jack, but his mind was made up on one point. He wasn't taking a pay load home that night.

Disregarding the gun and the threatening Spaniard, he turned his light again on the woman. Something about her puzzled him. He tried to lay hands on it and word what it was. Then, suddenly, it hit him. As he stared at her, at the blue lips and hectic splotches, he suddenly understood.

"Do we stand here until the morning?" Zuela demanded.

Jack shook off his daze. He jerked a thumb at the plane. "Doak, get back aboard." He pulled the wad of bills from his pocket and dropped it on the deck. "Your money, Zuela. I'm done. Find yourself another American rat with a plane."

Zuela jabbed the gun against his ribs. "Done? Maybe you *are.* Your sensible

friend and Gomez will fly the aeroplane home. You'll stay at Los Santos till—you have a change of mind. Your stand puts me in danger. You can't quit this business at whim. There's a saying that who mounts a tiger does not get off at will—"

The jab of the automatic exploded Jack. His fist caught Zuela on the chin, before the man could slip the trigger safety, and knocked him helpless. The taller Spaniard sprang on Jack. Doak stood bug-eyed. "Jack, watch that knife!" Jack felt the blade rip his sleeve and burn along his forearm.

With an uppercut he straightened the man up and dazed him, and then laid him over the engine housing with a long-swinging right.

He whirled on the other Spaniard, to obliterate him. But the man was standing aloof, his arms at his side.

"Hold," Metges said. He added slowly, "You are right in refusing us. I would not start a fire among human beings in *my* country, even in my country now."

THEY were clipping homeward full gun, high over the dark-silver carpet, when Doak finally got up nerve to speak. Jack's silence scared him. Jack did not even notice the blood dropping from his sleeve.

"If you don't mind talking about it, Jack, what touched you off like that back there?"

Through the propeller disc Jack was staring ahead, aiming the plane like a projectile at distant Chantra. "Didn't you see that woman? Shawna-Lee's got that same—the N'longo. That's what hit me."

Doak nearly jumped out of his safety belt. *"W-h-a-t!"*

"Her husband has it too. He'll die, in that hole, with no doctor. I'll see, by hell, they get one."

Doak's face had turned pasty. "You'd better 'tend to your own troubles. Look here, you've got to tell Emmly what's the matter with Shawna. He's got to know."

"What d'you think I'm burning up this motor for? Sure I'm telling Emmly. I as good as gave it to Shawna-Lee. Those sick people I brought in."

"Emmly won't believe it's this N'longo."

"He will when I get through talking."

"D'you mean you'll tell him about your angel sharking? You *will* not! I'm mixed up in your mess. I knew about it; even helped handle some of those people. You're not tangling me with the law."

"You got some of that money, didn't you? But don't worry. You'll be shielded."

They sped across the steamer lane in the Straits. Far ahead, above the Florida coast, Jack saw a bad weather area, streaked with incessant lightning. It lay athwart his sky path homeward. He started climbing, to fly over it.

Into his mind jigged something Fred Markham had said that afternoon. It had meant nothing then. It struck him like a club now.

"Some smart-aleck brought the white-horn in from Honduras, Jack. With some papaya seedlings. He jumped the Agriculture Inspection. Well, that little trick has cost the government, which means all of us, nearly half a million, and the end isn't in sight yet. You'll remember that the Medfly was brought into Florida by the booze boys. In the packing they used. It's a complex world we live in, Jack."

Jack thought, *That smart-aleck with the papayas, and those booze runners with the Medfly—they were pip-squeaks compared to me. That Spaniard said it: I've started a fire among human beings.*

"Jack"—they were fighting the chaotic air above the coast storm—"you've got to make Emmly hush up about Shawna's sickness. If he reports a case of N'longo there at Chantra, the authorities are going to start digging into where it came from."

"So you can put out a fire with a 'hush,' can you?"

"A fire? I don't know what you're talking about. You don't either. You've just gone all to pieces, Jack. Be reasonable."

"I'm talking about those sick people Dekker took north."

"What about 'em? They're no skin off us."

"That sounds like Zuela. Where's your conscience gone?"

"You're a nice one to talk about conscience."

"Damn it, I've got one! And a backbone too. I, uh—— Doak, let's not quarrel. But don't you see that every one of those people is a match in a dry woods? They've got to be traced and found."

"You'll get yourself in a barrel of trouble."

"So what?"

"Well, *I* count! Keep me out of this."

"You're out. That's only right. It was my doing."

A little after midnight they spotted the conspicuous light on Jack's lawn. Instead of his usual silent glide, Jack went down on power, hit mid-lake in a splashy landing, taxied across to the north shore, to Doak and Shawna-Lee's home, and swung alongside the small pier.

With Doak at his heels, pleading with him, he hurried across the lawn, into the house, and on into Shawna-Lee's dim-lighted room. The nurse had heard the plane and was peering out the window at the dark lake. Jack beckoned her aside and ordered:

"Go phone Dr. Emmly. Tell him to get here on the jump."

His manner frightened the nurse. She obeyed him without a word. After thumbing Doak out of the room, Jack stepped over to the white cot and bent down. Shawna-Lee was awake.

"Jack! I just had—the worst dream—about you."

He knelt down and kissed her hot cheek. "The Diomede coming in woke you up. I'm sorry, sweet."

"It was awfully bad, Jack." She lifted her arms. Jack had to help her put them around him, she was so weak. "Your plane cracked up, and you were all—"

"—cracked up too, I'll bet. Silly! Here I am, big and alive and bumptious." He kissed her hair and freshened the ice-pack on her forehead. "Shawna, listen. I've got something to tell you. Don't ask questions. And don't think it's just an encouraging lie. It's the truth. You're starting smack bang to get well. This sickness—we've got a twist in its tail now. It may take a little time, but you're out of the woods and on the road to the clear."

"But—but—"

"Sh-hh, no questions. Your job's to get well. And listen, Shawna. I've been in a woods myself. A bad one. Getting out will take me too a little *time,* I'm afraid. But I don't give a hoot. When I get out to the clear, we'll be together. That's what counts. Honey, don't forget about our Camaguey, St. Kitts—"

"—and Morgan's Isle and Rio Lu!"

"That's it. Keep remembering that."

In the hallway he passed the nurse, returning. In the living room he found Doak pawing his hair. Doak pounced on him.

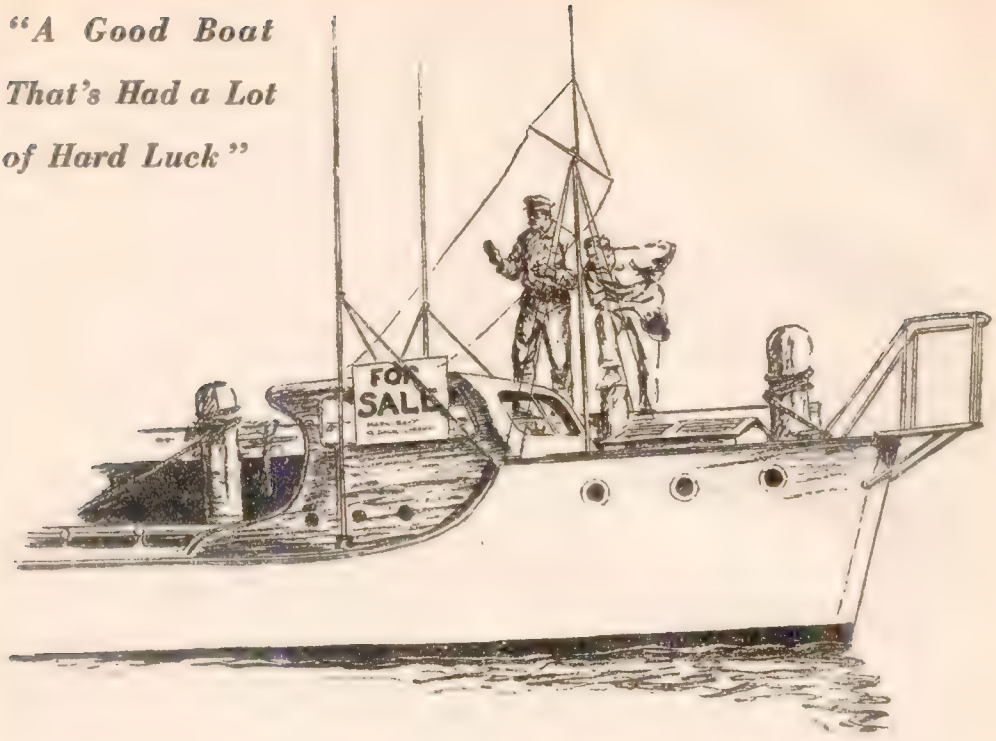
"What's in your crazy mind now?"

Jack stepped around him to the phone. "As I told you, Doak, those people have got to be found," he said. For the first time in weeks he was not carrying a load. "Those fires have got to be damped out before they start. I can't do it. Dekker and his outfit can't and wouldn't. But Mark can. He'll start the right balls rolling."

"*Markham?* Why Jack, why man, you're hanging a sentence on yourself!" He grabbed for the phone.

"Easy, Doak. I've thought this through." Jack turned his back on Doak and dialed. "Long distance? I want Tampa, Frederick Markham, Lafayette Street. . . . That's right. I'll hold the line." He turned to Doak again. "Shake yourself together, old-timer. You're carrying the ball now. You've got to run your spread and mine too. You've got to be the man of the family for a little while—you and your winter beans."

"A Good Boat That's Had a Lot of Hard Luck"



JINX SHIP

By BERTRAND W. SINCLAIR

Author of "The Thing That Couldn't Happen," etc.

STANDING by a littered desk Bun Seifert repeated his question in a puzzled tone. A dark-eyed stenographer paused in her staccato tapping to hear the salesman answer. A brisk high-power salesman entirely without conscience.

"The *Falcon* is a gift," Mark Best repeated. "If you can find a rotten spot in her wood, a defect in her engine, we'll give her to you."

Bun was looking at the salesman out of one gray eye, at the curly-haired girl with the other. He saw a queer look flit across her face.

"At the price," Bun said slowly, "she's so much a gift it seems screwy to me. What's the catch?"

"Just a good boat cheap for a quick sale," Mark Best declared.

"I'm goin' to look around some more," Bun said.

"Better look fast," Mark Best advised. "Better grab this, Seifert, while the grabbing's good. You won't find anything half as good for double the price."

"I might find out something about this one," Bun observed.

"Mark," the girl cut in, "you know that if he says *Falcon* anywhere in Coal Harbor he'll get an earful."

"I wouldn't belittle a good boat," Mark Best shrugged his shoulders, "by repeating what any superstitious fool says. Plenty of fishboats have had fires, been in collision, or sunk."

"Oh," Bun pricked up his ears. "You didn't mention any of that."

"Nothing to it," Mark Best said. "She's first-class, Grade A."

"Gimme the key," Bun said, on impulse. "I'll look her over again. By myself. Without bein' distracted by high-pressure sales talk."

"Sure," Mark Best agreed: "Hop to it. I know she's okay."

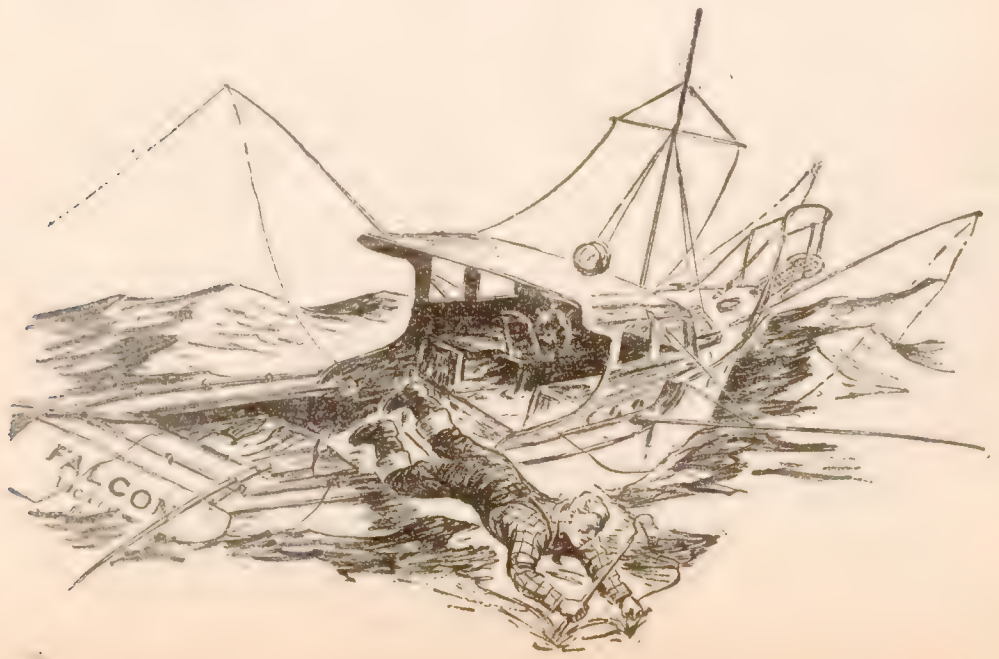
Down on the slip Bun unlocked the *Falcon,* stepped down into a cabin full of that musty smell a boat acquires in a long lay-up.

Everywhere an accumulation of fine dust. A husky four-cylinder motor sat on heavy bed-timbers. Good compass. Steering-gear strong and expensive. Trolling gurdys on her back deck solid brass. Bun started the motor. Sat listening. It hummed like a sewing machine. When he looked at the size of the *Falcon's* timbers, jabbed hard, sound wood in the hidden places where dry rot begins, he stood still shaking his head.

"She's built," he muttered. "She got lines an' power. I never saw so much boat offered for so little money. There must be some reason why a packet like this goes beggin' at five hundred bucks."

Bun stood puzzling over that. He had to have a boat. The haywire rig he had fished for two seasons had gone to pieces under him in mid-season. He had not hoped to find anything half so good as this, for his money. He could go out, fully rigged, free of debt, if he took the *Falcon.* But there was a screw loose somewhere. He knew it.

BUN SEIFERT'S home port was a long way from the Vancouver dock on which he stood. But the ways of wharf-rats and beach-combers are much alike in all the ports of the world. Bun locked the *Falcon,* sauntered along the Coal Harbor slips. Men were painting, repairing, or just loafing. Conversation comes easy on the waterfront. Bun didn't have to pry for information about the *Falcon.* It was handed to him in large, juicy gobs when he mentioned her name. Bun came back and he *did* have an earful. He stood on the ship staring at the beauti-



fully curved sheer of the *Falcon,* his mind full of a doubt, of wonder.

A chunky thirty-foot troller with tall varnished poles slid in to a vacant berth. Bun moved along to where this fisherman, in from the Gulf, sat down on his hatch to roll a cigarette.

"How's trollin'?" Bun asked.

"Bluebacks been fair," he said. He was a slim-round-faced boy. He looked at Bun out of dark eyes, and Bun wondered where he had seen him—until he remembered the face of that girl in the office ashore. "Time to head north for coho, though."

"Yeah, about time," Bun agreed. They talked casually for a minute. Bun said abruptly, "Know anything about this boat *Falcon?*"

"Plenty," the youngster said. "An' nothin' good."

"She looks good," Bun said. "An' she can be bought cheap."

"Lay off her," the boy drawled. "She's dear at any price."

"Why?" Bun asked.

"She's jinxed. Jinxed since the day she was launched," the boy said in a sour tone. "I should know. My uncle built her. She stuck on the ways. When they got her started again a chock let go. She fell over on her side and cracked three frames. They put her into the water with jacks, sideways like a crab. First time she went out in the Inlet the engine back-fired, ignited some loose gas. The explosion killed a girl that had gone on the trial trip for fun. After that—aw, hell, she's hoodooed, Jonahed. The devil's in her. She's never made a long trip that she hasn't come to grief. She's been sunk, burned, stranded. It never does her any great damage, but at least five people been killed off her. She was a pleasure boat first.

"Then," he went on, "a fisherman got her two years ago. Rebuilt her upper works for a troller. She wouldn't fish. She was always in trouble. She changed hands half a dozen times. The last stunt she hit a log in the Gulf an' opened her seams. The guy on her woulda drowned only a tug came along an' dragged him ashore with his deck awash. He brought her in an' had her repaired. But he never took her out again. Nobody would that knows her. That's why she's laid here eight months. For sale. Dirt cheap. Mark Best says a sucker will always bite once."

"You don't think much of her, do you?" Bun remarked.

"She's black-hearted," the boy said. "Boats can be like that. She's a killer."

"And yet," he added, after a pause, "I have a sister that thinks the *Falcon* is just a dog with a bad name." He snorted disdainfully.

"Would that be your sister in the Boats, Incorporated, office?" Bun inquired.

"Yeah, that's her," the youngster nodded. "I'm Doug MacGregor. She's Mary. Did she pop off when Mark made his sales talk?"

"N—no," Bun said. What Mary MacGregor said didn't sound to him like popping off.

"She thinks Mark ought to explain to a prospect that the *Falcon* is a good boat that's had a lot of hard luck," Doug drawled. "She'll lose her job if she ever queers a sale for Mark Best, though. You think of buyin' that hunk of Gorgonzola?"

Bun nodded.

"You'll be stickin' your neck out," young MacGregor prophesied. "She's the prize jinx boat of the B. C. coast."

"It'll be my neck," Bun grinned. "Thanks for the dope."

He went back aboard the *Falcon,* sat on a bunk staring about him, thinking, thinking hard. Bun Seifert had never believed much in black cats, thirteen at table, walking under ladders, or the things a man shouldn't do at the change of the moon. Yet Coal Harbor had piled up evidence of a jinx that worked overtime for the *Falcon.* A real jinx, Bun conceded, might be hard to shake. Yet a good-looking boat, a sound boat, for a song he could sing so easily!

A STEP sounded on deck. A shadow darkened the wheelhouse door. Mary MacGregor put her head in, a black, curly bare head. Mary's eyes, Bun decided, had mischief in them.

"Still dallying with temptation?" she asked.

"Kinda," Bun replied. "She's a sweet packet with a bad stink about her. I been wonderin' how much is fact an' how much fiction."

"Doug says he didn't tell you the half of it," Mary said soberly. "Did he tell you I think that she's just been man-handled?"

"You sound," Bun hazarded, "as if you had a soft spot in your heart for this packet your brother calls nasty names. Why?"

Mary MacGregor came down the steps. She stood with one hand on the rim of the little sink by the galley stove.

"I was living with Uncle Jim," she said, "still going to school when he built the *Falcon* in his shop over on the Fraser. I watched him lay her down, and I saw her grow plank by plank. I was always crazy about boats. I actually got to love this ship, watching her grow. I played around in the shop when I wasn't in school. I used to dream about going to sea in the *Falcon*. I cried when she stuck on the ways. Right there they began to talk about her being an unlucky boat. I don't know. I never could believe that a boat honestly built by an honest shipwright could be bad like they say the *Falcon* is. I don't believe in jinxes. I—but still I wouldn't like to see any salmon troller get stuck with a boat he couldn't fish. I know how tough a racket trolling is. I've been out with Doug, and I've pulled plenty of salmon."

"Sez she, talkin' like a native, an' lookin' like a number one glamor girl," Bun said lightly. "Just the same, I'm buyin' this packet."

Doug MacGregor yelled from the *Wee Mac*, "Hey, Mary, coffee's on."

"Your blood be on your own head," Mary said as she turned to the companion steps, a tinge of color in her cheeks.

"Yeah, everybody's warned me," Bun nodded. "And that's that. How about goin' to a picture show with me tonight?"

The girl turned on the top step.

"You're a pretty fast worker, aren't you?" she smiled.

"A salmon troller has to be," Bun laughed. "If you know fishermen, you know that."

OTHER people put bugs in Bun Seifert's ear before he finished outfitting the *Falcon*. She was jinxed, Jonahed, the devil was in her from the laying of her keel, they said. By the time he was ready to clear Bun almost wished he had never seen the *Falcon*. That croaking got under his skin. The *Falcon* was beautifully shaped. She was strong. She had the lines of a seaboat. Her engine was good as new. The rest, Bun told himself, lay in the hands of the man who helmed her.

Still—they said she wouldn't fish. Never had, never would. And there were boats built that wouldn't fish, Bun knew. But as far as the *Falcon* was concerned he was from Missouri. He had taken her as a man takes a bride, on trust, in good faith. He meant to treat her right, and he hoped she would do right by him. But there were times when he had his doubts.

"Wish you all the luck there is," were Doug MacGregor's parting words, "but I wouldn't touch her with a ten-foot pole."

"I'll be seein' you around Bull Harbor, maybe," Bun told Mary the night before he sailed. "Doug told me you were comin' up there to spend your vacation with him."

"I wish I could go now," Mary said pensively. "Fifty weeks a year in a stuffy office is getting me down. I'm a beachcomber at heart."

"If I make a killin' on salmon this fall I'll give you a job as deckhand next season," Bun offered.

"You would, would you?" Mary

laughed. "Come around in the spring and proposition me. And you have to shake the *Falcon's* jinx."

"Consider it shook," Bun told her lightly. "I live a pure life an' no jinx can flourish around me."

HE WASN'T so sure of that after three or four days on the grounds along Texada Island. Bun had put all his money into grub, gas and gear. He needed forty or fifty dollars cash to make his mind easy on that three hundred mile jump to the coho grounds. He set out to snatch a few bluebacks in the Gulf.

And the *Falcon* would not fish. It seemed as if the mere whirl of her propeller scared away the salmon. On a school where other boats took plenty Bun didn't make expenses.

When he lay at anchor by a fish camp he could all but hear the other trollers mutter. Jinx ship. Never did fish. Never would. All the lousy crate was good for was to drown people, burn them to death, or blow them up.

Bun Seifert gritted his teeth. If this were true he was sunk. He could never get his money out of her. Little things kept getting in his hair. His dinghy got adrift when he could have sworn it was secure. Once his motor stalled when he was right in heavy breakers along shore. His little oil stove flared and singed all the hair off his eyebrows. Trifles he would have thought no more of if his mind hadn't been saturated with that jinx talk, that widespread and deep conviction that the *Falcon* was a hoodoo ship, doomed to disaster.

But the deadly thing was that she wouldn't fish. She *had* to fish. Bun had to get salmon. A couple of barren weeks and he would be on the beach, washed up, stuck with a ship no troller who knew her would take as a gift.

Bun shoved away from Texada sick of seeing salmon flash silver over the stern of every boat but his. If she wouldn't fish shallow maybe she would fish deep. Out in blue water he ran his spoons down to thirty fathoms—and there he took a few out of the dusky depths where salmon swam far below surface disturbance.

But the blue backs were not offshore at depth in any numbers. The small feed was banked around the shores and salmon schools hang where the feed swims. The best fishing was less than twelve fathoms. Two days outside got him less than thirty fish—but it also gave him a definite idea.

Five miles away from any boat he set the *Falcon* on a course and got down on his knees in the bilge, listening with his ear pressed to the planking. The hull of any ship is a perfect sounding-board. Bun listened as a doctor listens with a stethoscope. After a long time he detected an intermittent tap. Sharp at times. But only to be heard with his ear on the keelson. As if some evil spirit telegraphed the salmon in code: "Keep away—keep away—keep away."

Salmon hear through their skin. Any metallic rap scares them as a shot scares birds, if that clack is broadcast through the water.

Bun tried every mechanical adjustment he knew inside the hull without result. That afternoon he slanted into a still cove and beached the *Falcon* on a high tide. When the ebb bared her he set to work again. He lay there through three tides, patiently checking. And at last he found the knock. His propeller shaft whipped intermittently in a slack bearing bedded in the middle of the shaft-log.

He chiseled the wood away, hacksawed the bearing to pieces, plugged the hole with cement and floated the *Falcon* again.

The next day he took ninety blueback salmon among a fleet of boats outside Gillis Bay. For three days he was high boat in that area. He made sixty dollars and he could have sung. He had made the *Falcon* fish like a high-liner.

With that ace in the hole Bun headed north. Without mishap he ran the

swift tideraces of Cardero Channel and Johnstone Strait. When he turned into Cascade Harbor the first boat he sighted was Doug MacGregor's *Wee Mac* rolling in ahead of him on a heavy ground swell from the open sea.

"Been pretty good around Storm Islands for two-three days," Doug told him after they tied up. "I got to stick here till the next steamer to pick up Mary. How goes the jinx ship?"

"She's ain't killed nobody since I had her," Bun replied. He was slightly sensitive about cracks like that. It was bad enough to be conscious of a jinx without being reminded by his fellows.

And just as Bun thought he had a clean sheet the *Falcon's* evil genius proved that it still perched on her masthead. Bun trolled over a shoal in fog the first morning out of Cascade and lost half his gear. On ground he knew. He was certain he had steered a good course. But the *Falcon* found that shallow and it cost Bun a twelve-dollar spool of wire line and several of his pet spoons, besides fifty pounds of lead. He repaired the damage and went on fishing doggedly, warily, wondering what could happen next.

FOR three days nothing happened. Bun took an average catch. Then he got among a school one afternoon offshore and took a thousand pounds of spring salmon.

"By heck, you have sure made her fish," Doug conceded. "She never did that for anybody."

A big Norse troller stood on the float beside Doug. He looked at the *Falcon* and he spat in the sea. His big red face was wooden under a shock of yellow hair. He said, "Dat boat she's drown you someday. I know one troller she's break hees heart. You got more nerve dan sense for feesh dat jinx boat."

He spat in the sea again and walked away. Bun shrugged his shoulder. He had heard that so many times. The hell of it was sometimes he suspected it might be a ghastly truth. Doug MacGregor looked at Bun.

"I guess you get kinda fed up with that sort of talk," he said. "Mary's the only one ever has a good word for the *Falcon*. Anyway she fishes for you an' that's somethin'."

"Yeah, you fish," Bun said, down in his cabin, "but what'll you pull next, damn your wooden soul?"

"That's screwy," he thought, a moment later, "talkin' to a boat as if she were a person. I'm slippin'. I better take a brace."

For a few days the *Falcon* did nothing but what he asked her to do. Bun fished in fog and sun. The Storm Island run slacked off and Bun thought of slanting north to Table Island and Hakai. But Mary McGregor was aboard the *Wee Mac*. It was pleasant to talk to Mary when the fleet came in at night. The coho drifted in small schools on their way to spawning streams. A man's luck was as likely to be good there as any place. The *Falcon* got her share.

Bun took long slants offshore hunting salmon. The *Falcon* had more beam and draft, was more heavily built than most trollers. She was like a galloping goose in a chop or tide-rip. Bun thought she might be better in heavy going. But he wouldn't know until he hit a real sea. He wondered how she would behave then. And the fifth day after Mary MacGregor came, Bun found out.

HE BORE west from Cascade in a moderate fog. Sometimes in that latitude the fog shifts like a gray pall across the sea long after the wind gets up. Sometimes a nor'wester huffs and puffs hard enough to blow a man's house down and the sea heaves in sharp crests before the fog clears. Those deep vapors breed far out in the Japan current and they keep rolling in.

Bun got caught in that sort of thing fifteen miles at sea. Ordinarily he would

have pulled his gear and run before the freshening wind. But he was taking salmon fast. He was used to fog and heavy weather. And he never thought about the *Falcon's* jinx when he got among fish.

The fog billowed past, opening and closing. Little by little the wind stirred the sea until the swells peaked sharp, began to show little white curls. But the coho was still biting. Any troller will stay with salmon as long as he can stand in his cockpit and handle gear.

Bun turned for home at last, still trolling. It was a fair wind. The *Falcon* eased along stern to wind and sea, wallowing a little when she settled in the trough. Bun's six lines trailed. Between salmon he marked the *Falcon's* action closely.

"She acts like a damn good seaboat," he thought. "She goes a lot easier in this big stuff than she does in a chop."

He leaned over the bulwark around his afterdeck. Leader taut in his left hand, up-raised gaff in his right, reaching to club a fighting salmon.

The *Falcon's* stern rose on a green comber. Bun bent a little to gaff that fish. She rolled slightly down. His hand almost touched the water.

Suddenly as if some spur had galvanized her the *Falcon* snapped herself the other way. She jerked herself right from under Bun Seifert's feet. Gaff in hand he went overside like a swimmer making a low dive, head down, feet up. As his fair head buried in that green he thought: "She was layin' for me all the time. She's got me now."

He clung to the leader. It snapped under his weight. Bun came up thirty feet astern. Blew salt water from mouth and nostrils like a seal. For a moment panic gripped. He beat the water in a vain effort to catch the *Falcon*. Waste effort. Faced by the inevitable Bun gave over. The *Falcon* moved on until she was only a ghost shape in the swirling fog.

No use to cry out. No use to struggle like an animal in a trap. Bun was a good swimmer but he could not swim fifteen miles in a cold ocean lashed by a gale. He could keep himself afloat a long time, paddling easy. Until his limbs grew numb and he sank, walled in by that clammy mist, in a soundless void of heaving green.

He shed his boots, overalls, mackinaw jacket. He could still hear the *Falcon's* exhaust, purring faint. Another score for the jinx ship. No one would know what happened. Only the crabs and dogfish that nose the ocean floor.

HIS arms moved mechanically. The cold North Pacific water chilled his flesh. Fear nipped at him. He bared his teeth in a snarl of defiance. Surely a man could die without blubbering and screaming till the seal filled his mouth?

The *Falcon* was hidden in the fog. But Bun could still occasionally hear that exhaust whisper. Somewhere in that murk the *Falcon* rolled, rolled heavily, forging on.

With no hand on the steering wheel the torque of her propeller would swing her in a great circle, within the circumference of which she had cast him to drown. Bucked overboard by a ship that harbored evil in her wooden heart.

For a long time he heard nothing but the slither and purl of small crests slapping near his face. The swells lifted him high, dropped him into green pits, heaved him up again. Soon, Bun reflected, this misery would end.

Then, as he lifted on a wave, he saw the dim shape of a troller, main poles boomed-out, bow-poles like the forked antennae of some giant beetle. Bun shouted. Shouted loudly as he sank in a hollow. His teeth bit off a wild yell when he rose again. Now he recognized that masthead, those flaring bows. He knew there could be no answer to his hail, no helping hand.

It was only the *Falcon* come back. Bun Seifert cursed her through his chattering

teeth. For a few seconds. Then a strange feeling came over him.

Because the *Falcon* was returning to him as if the quality of mercy had awakened in her. She swung, bearing for him. Her outline became sharp, clear. She rolled, heeled over, yawed. But with each erratic dip and twist she moved nearer.

Bun didn't have to swim ten feet to get right under her high flared bow. It was almost as if she were feeling for him, turning to him where he struggled for his life.

His hands pawed at her smooth white hull as she slid past. The *Falcon* had high freeboard, an eighteen inch bulwark around her afterdeck. Bun had to heave high to reach that, to get his fingers over the rail.

He had no strength to haul himself up. But his fingers clutched that gumwood as an eagle's talons clamp on a struck rabbit. They froze in the iron grip of despair.

And then the *Falcon* rolled down to him. Rolled deep, rolled slow, rolled till the scuppers on that side were awash. Bun had only to give himself a little pull to fall inboard and lie gasping on the solid deck while the *Falcon* marched on across the sea.

HE GOT his breath in a minute. His heart stopped drumming against his ribs. Five minutes earlier his chances were not worth a dime a dozen. Now one hand rested on solid wood, the other touched the tarnished brass of his gurdy spools. There was even a salmon jigging on a starboard line, clinking the little bell. Bun laughed aloud.

"Ring an' be damned!" said he "I'll let you in when I'm good an' ready."

He stared down through the wheelhouse doorway, to where the motor chattered softly on its bed-timbers.

"I guess you got a heart, after all," Bun said. "You set out to drown me an' then you change your mind. You're a funny ship. You got queer ways. But you've done all right by me, *Falcon*. You've worried me, an' I've been scared of you. But not any more."

He shook himself.

"Sounds goofy," he muttered. "But I mean it. God, that was a close call!"

Bun went shivering down into the cabin, changed to dry clothes. Then he got a coarse burlap sack and tacked that burlap over the floor of his working cockpit. He knew he should have made his footing there secure, from the beginning. Wet wood and rubber boots are a bad combination in rough water.

Then he cleared his lines of salmon, landing three. The wind whipped the fog to shreds while he pulled his gear. It was now too rough to fish.

He ran for Cascade before seas that lumped higher, broke more sharply, harried by a wind that whistled and whined in his stays. No other craft in sight. Nothing but that westerly lashing the ocean, and the dark loom of the land over his bows.

BUN didn't mention that incident when he came in. A man does not care to recite miracles to unbelieving ears. Bun had never known of a troller falling overboard and his unhelmed ship coming back to pick him up. So he let it lie.

Talked fishing instead. No one had done much good that day. Bun, far offshore, had a fair catch. He sat talking to Doug and Mary.

"They're gone from Storm Islands and the Pass," Bun said. "That school I hit might be a fresh run drifting in. Let's head back out there in the mornin'."

"Okay, if this wind stops," Doug agreed.

The wind droned over Cascade, swaying the tall spruce that ringed the harbor with a green wall. Outside, the ocean surf snored like a row of sleeping giants. But during the night the blow died. The fleet took off in a clear dawn, over a heavy sullen swell. They lurched across jade-

green valleys so deep that when one went down into the trough he was lost to view. Most of them turned aside in the first mile to seek salmon in quieter waters.

By the time Bun was ten miles out he trolled alone. He had marked Doug MacGregor turn aside toward Hope Island, where he could run straight into Shadwell Pass. The *Wee Mac* had neither the weight nor power of the *Falcon*. It would only take an hour of rising wind to make that tremendous swell a dangerous sea. Bun chanced that. He had a feeling now that the *Falcon* might swoop and dip like the bird she was named for, but always with complete mastery of her flight. She might have drowned men and burned them. No sea had ever harmed *her*.

Bun struck salmon. Near noon the wind, the diurnal westerly, struck him. He stowed his gear and ran. In great swoops on the forefront of great round-topped seas. Hands on the spokes of the wheel, Bun watched the *Falcon* take that going like a steeplechaser taking low hurdles.

"Another ton of ballast spread out in your bilges, old girl," he muttered, "would make you walk these seas like a duchess crossin' a ballroom floor."

Twenty minutes out of Cascade Bun saw a boat floundering closer in to Vansittart Island than any boat should be. She rolled, disappearing in hollows. Out of control. Two other small boats maneuvered about her.

Bun turned at once. Taking it abeam he eased the *Falcon* over the big ones. They broke. Getting dirty. Presently he recognized the *Wee Mac*. Broke down on a lee shore. Wind and sea forcing her in on a shoal, boulder-studded, where twenty-foot walls of green comber reared up and broke in foam. She was already in dangerous shallows. The two small boats drew away. They had no business out there at all. Bun could see a big two-stick bank troller coming out the Pass, smashing into seas. But she was too late.

"Falcon," Bun gritted his teeth, "this is the kinda spot where your jinx has always got in its work. Be your age an' do your stuff, or this time we'll go to hell together!"

On his after deck Bun had sixty fathoms of anchor line coiled to run free. To the end of that he bent a light line with a three-pound lead to throw.

BUN surged full speed into that angry water. The *Wee Mac* was already in the first breaker. She fell down its steep face as the *Falcon* rose on its crest. Bun saw, heard, felt the *Wee Mac's* keel touch bottom. He saw her list, as the *Falcon* came abeam.

Bun shot the lead. He didn't stop to watch. There was only one slim chance. He saw Doug get his hands on the line, haul.

Wheel hard over, throttle wide, the *Falcon* turned on the steep slope of a great wave. Below, to starboard, Bun saw for an instant a boulder squatted like a monstrous toad on rough bottom. His keel had shaved that. His heart stood still. He was going up, broadside on. That sea had a seven-foot crest with a white sea-horse mane curling.

It broke over him from stem to stern. Bun ducked his head. Glass splintered in two wheelhouse windows. Tons, more or less, of water poured over her. Spray blinded him for a second or two. The *Falcon* lay on her beam ends shuddering. The line from the *Wee Mac*, bar-tight, held her down. The *Falcon* wallowed on her side, until Bun thought she would never right herself, never rise out of that white cauldron.

She did rise, slowly, poised herself, met the next breaker bow on like a rearing horse. She dragged the *Wee Mac* out of those hungry breakers, out into the easier heave of deep water.

Doug MacGregor's boat listed heavily, but she floated. Bun could see Mary holding to a slat in the shelter of the little wheelhouse. He stood away for Cascade,

followed by the little boats that had stood by, helpless. It wasn't far.

BUT it was nearly too far for the *Wee Mac*. Her back deck was all but awash when the *Falcon* slid by the fish-camp float to a flat ledge of rock that bared at low tide. Willing hands and pikepoles beached her safely. Bun backed the *Falcon* and came alongside the fish-float to unload his catch.

Mary MacGregor walked around the shore. She came aboard, soaked to the skin.

"We're like drowned rats," she said. "Everything's wet. The sea came in everywhere. Brother, can you spare a shirt?"

"Dry clothes in the locker under my bunk," Bun told her. "Take anything you need."

Doug came on the float as Bun heaved the last salmon. A dozen trollers stood around. They looked across at the *Wee Mac*. They stared at the *Falcon*, up and down, from deck to truck.

"Damage you much?" Bun asked.

"Plenty," Doug said. "Split plankin' an' cracked frames. Can't tell till I get her dry. We touched twice. The second bump put my mast an' poles overside. Maybe her back's broken. He paused a moment. "Lucky at that. Thanks to you."

"Yeah," a troller said. "Lucky a guy had the guts to get to you, an' the power to handle both boats. If my line had held I coulda kept you outa there. But it was curtains for me to get in them breakers."

"Sure was," another growled. "Took a jinx boat to turn the trick. Guess the *Falcon's* jinx was takin' a day off."

Bun's eyes went hot and bright. He stepped off on the float.

"Damn your soul!" he said angrily. "You or anybody else springs any more of that jinx talk I'll take you apart. Anything a boat can do for a fisherman the *Falcon* will do. She's done it, hasn't she? I'm sick of hearin' this chatter about a jinx."

Doug and Mary and Bun sat over hot coffee in the *Falcon's* cabin.

"Sorry your holiday got busted up like that, sis," Doug said. "I'll be on the beach a long time repairin' an' gettin' re-rigged. I'll have to fish spring salmon many a cold an' frosty mornin' this winter to make up for this."

"You'll get by," Mary told him. "We always do."

Doug went away to look over his stranded ship. Mary MacGregor sat gazing down at the floor.

"Funny," she said at last. "I always believed in the *Falcon*. Now she delivers in a pinch. There can't be any jinx, Bun."

"It was a darned tight pinch, if you ask me," Bun said. "Were you scared?"

"For a minute," Mary answered, "when you turned and that sea broke right on top of you. For a little while you were just buried in spray and foam. I thought you'd never come up."

"So you love the *Falcon*, for all her hellish past," Bun murmured. "Suppose you could love the man that runs her?"

Mary MacGregor's face flooded with color. Her eyelids fluttered once or twice. She turned away, and then she turned back and laid her face against Bun Seifert's breast.

"Why, yes," Mary whispered. "I guess I could. I guess I do."

"That's fine," Bun said in her ear. "You won't have to lose the last few days of your vacation. You can take a permanent vacation from an office job. You an' me an' the *Falcon* can go places an' do things."

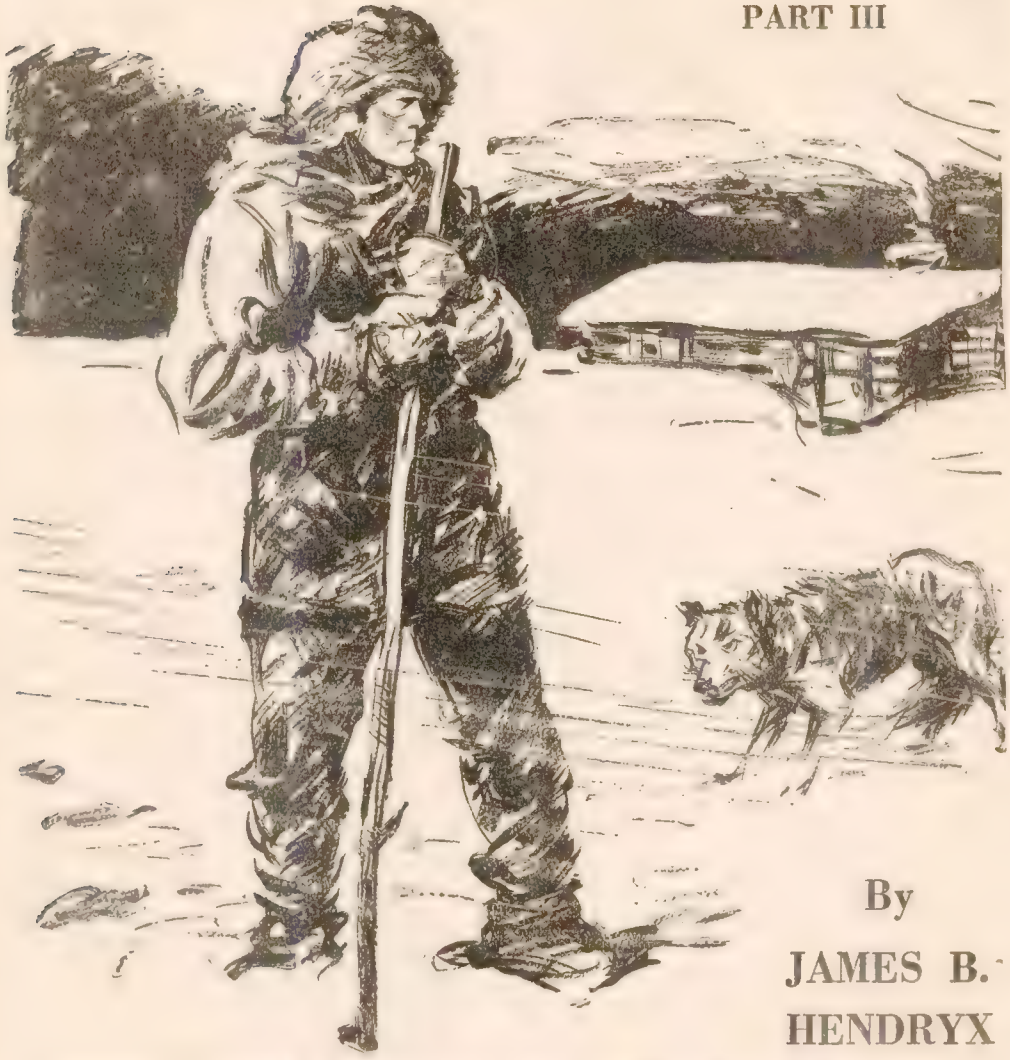
Mary ran her fingers through her black curly hair. The sea water had tucked it into tight little rings.

"And for years," she said scornfully, "they said she was no good. That she was jinxed. I heard what you said to that fisherman, Bun. It tickled me pink."

"A jinx," Bun told her, "is somethin' that can only do you harm if you believe in it hard enough to let it get you down."

HARD ROCK MAN

PART III



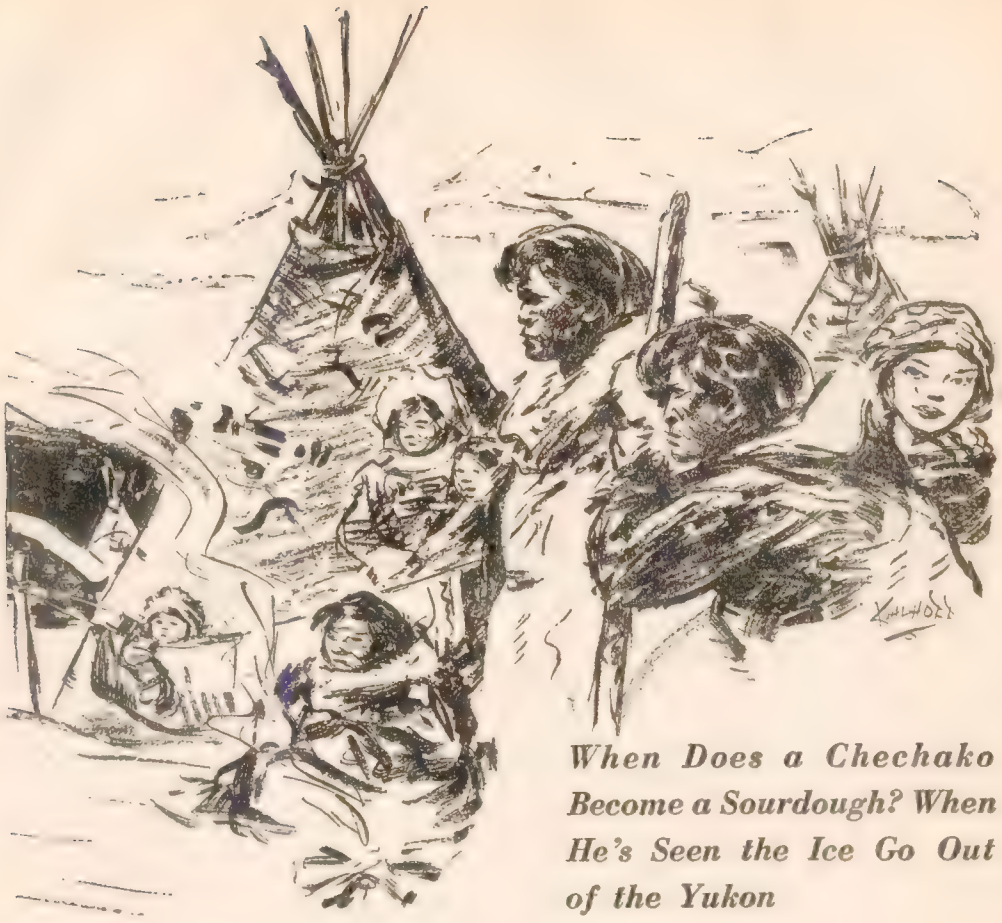
By JAMES B. HENDRYX

Author of "Edge of Beyond" and Many Other Novels of the North

SOMETHING ABOUT THE STORY AND WHAT HAS HAPPENED BEFORE

THE *Malaspina,* a ship carrying a gold rush time passenger list north to the Klondike is wrecked off the treacherous coast.

The passengers had comprised all sorts and conditions of men stampeding north for gold. Among them was young Tom Carter, a hard rock man, but who, as some of the old-timers on the ship said, was young enough to live it down. After the catastrophe of the wreck, Carter finds



When Does a Chechako Become a Sourdough? When He's Seen the Ice Go Out of the Yukon

himself in a battered lifeboat, together with Thornton, a young Englishman, Marshall, a notorious gambler, Lapointe, a treacherous half-breed, and Judy Steele—daughter of a mining man and a true sourdough if there ever was one. Judy had been coming home from school in the States, and it is she who shows the others how to survive in the wilderness when they finally manage to make their way to a bleak northern island. Here they stay many weeks, outwit Lapointe who tries to cheat them and know nothing of outside affairs, least of all of the $50,000 reward posted by old Bill Steele for news of his daughter.

Marshall is killed, but Carter, Thornton and the girl are finally picked up by a fishing boat—only to have it wrecked in a dense fog off an unknown coast. They escape in one of the fisherman's dories.

Chapter XVI

THE COAST AT LAST!

ALL about the dory the fog eddied and swirled in the cross currents of air that resulted from the stiff wind striking against the perpendicular rock cliffs that towered close at hand. The light craft rode the waves like a cork as Carter and Thornton labored at the oars to hold her quartering into the wind. Somewhere in the thick smother the other dory from the ill-fated *Sally B,* containing the engineer and the two deck hands, was heading presumably for Yakutat.

In the stern, Judith Steele smiled into the faces of the two men. "We've lost the other boat," she said.

"An' good riddance, I'd say!" Thornton replied. "But if we should ever find it

in this fog, I'll jolly well bash in that engineer's head with my oar for flourishin' his razor at me!"

"I'm not so interested in attacking 'em," the girl smiled, "as I am in following 'em. They probably know the way to Yakutat. We've got to find some place to land. And we may have to go a long way."

"We'll make it, all right," Carter said, "whether we sight the other boat, or not. This little dory handles nicely. It isn't as though we had that big *Malaspina* lifeboat. Lionel and I can hold her off the rocks, and we'll keep working her along."

"The only trouble with that is that we may pass Yakutat in the fog. It may be just a small dock in some cove with a few Siwash cabins around it, and we could slip by without ever knowing it."

"Well, we'll jolly well keep right on goin' till we come to the next town, then!"

"And that might be a hundred miles—or a thousand, for all I know," the girl smiled.

"We can hold this boat about where we want her," Carter said. "We'll ease off on the oars and let her drift in closer to shore. As this breeze hits that rock wall it forms a sharp up-current that swirls the fog up with it and we can at least be sure of not passing Yakutat without knowing it. Surely there'll be a break of some kind in the rocks—some cove, or river mouth, or strip of beach—where we can land, even if we don't find Yakutat."

"And you bet, Yakutat or no Yakutat, we'll land at the first place we come to!" Judith exclaimed. "If this wind should pick up we wouldn't have a chance in the world on a coast like this."

Carter nodded. "I was thinking the same thing," he said. "We're in closer now. See, the fog is swirling upward. Hold her about here, Lionel! Look, we can see the rocks, and we'll just keep working along 'em."

For three hours they worked the dory along the base of the great rock wall, with the surf thundering in their ears and the fog billowing about them, when suddenly the girl leaned forward and pointed ahead. "Look!" she cried. "There's a break in the rocks. It's a bay, or the mouth of a river."

The men redoubled their efforts and a few minutes later reached the break in the line of rocks that turned the sea back upon itself in a thunderous roar of frustration.

They entered what seemed to be a deep cove. "Keep her bow quartering into the wind and let her drift in," Carter ordered, easing off on the oars. "This may just be an inlet with no landing beach. The rocks may rise straight up at the head of it, the same as they do all along this damn coast. We don't want to be caught in a cul-de-sac that we can't get out of. We've got to be ready to pull like the devil if we have to without having to turn around with this sea running."

FOR a quarter of an hour they drifted with the waves which seemed not quite so high. They kept the nearer wall in sight but had no means of knowing how wide the inlet was, as the fog shut off a view of the opposite side. The waves gradually flattened into long swells which broke into short chops as the girl cried out, "Look—the water's a different color! We're in the mouth of a river."

"Sure we are," Carter agreed. "It's the current that's making these choppy little waves. Swing her around, Lionel, and we'll head her upstream."

A few minutes later the eddying fog allowed them a glimpse of the steep timbered slopes of a river valley, and they beached the dory on a flat stretch of gravel.

"Well—here we are," Carter cried, stepping onto the shingle and stretching prodigiously.

Thornton stared at the timbered slopes that rose to disappear in the swirling fog. "Haw! But *where* are we?"

"I don't care where we are—just so we're on land!" the girl exclaimed, a note

of vast relief in her voice. "I've had enough of the sea to last me the rest of my life. Nobody'll get me on any water bigger than the Yukon again—ever!"

"But if you should want to travel, you know," Thornton reminded her, "you'd jolly well *have* to get out by way of the sea."

"I'll do my traveling after this on foot, mushing along behind a dog sled, or on river steamers, or in a canoe or york boat—and I'll do it inside. I've seen all I want to of the outside, and of the sea, too. I know when I've had enough."

Carter smiled. "I guess you'll have to make at least one more sea voyage, though," he said. "We've got to get to this Yakutat, or some place where we can catch a boat of some kind for Skagway. We couldn't possibly signal any boat in from here."

"You'll have to guess again, then," the girl replied. "Even if we could signal, and a boat should put in here, I wouldn't get on her. When a person's on land, they've always got a chance, no matter what happens. There's always something you can do. But on the sea it's all blind luck. Even a big ship like the *Malaspina's* got to have luck to get through. And if your luck don't hold, there's nothing you can do about it. Why, we've been practically helpless for the past six weeks—first on the *Malaspina,* then on that hatch cover, and in the lifeboat, and the bidarka and the fish boat, and then in this dory—and any minute we could have been wiped out, and there wouldn't have been anything we could do about it! I don't mind facing danger—but I want a run for my money, as Marshall would say. I want to be where I can do something about it."

Carter nodded. "I see what you mean. There is a relentlessness about the sea that the land doesn't have. For instance, on that hatch cover — if that lifeboat hadn't loomed out of the fog and bumped right into us, we'd never have survived. Neither of us could have lived long in that cold water, and there wasn't a thing in the world that we could have done to help ourselves. And again, when the lifeboat was whirled through that narrow gut between those islands. We missed destruction there by a matter of inches. If we'd hit the rocks there wouldn't have been a thing we could do.

"And if that tug hadn't come along just when it did, that bidarka would have filled with water and we'd have sunk. We couldn't possibly have bailed fast enough to keep her afloat. And if we hadn't gotten all the breaks we'd never have made it here off that wrecked fish tug, either. Our luck's sure been running, as Marshall would say—but there's such a thing as tempting luck too far. It's bound to change, sometime."

"That's all very true, an' all that," Thornton admitted, "but after all, we started for the Klondike. An' this isn't the Klondike."

"We'll follow up this river and hit the Yukon country overland," the girl said.

"But—where does this bally river go?"

The girl smiled. "It goes to here. It's where it comes from that interests us. We've got to find that out. We'll push on up in the dory as far as we can, and then we'll go on afoot. We'll run into some Siwashes, most likely. But even if we don't we're better off than we were on that island."

"That's right," Carter agreed. "We've got that bucket with about twenty feet of line tied to the bail that I dipped up the water for our bath in. I threw it into the dory, and that cake of soap, too."

"An' I salvaged the razor that ruddy engineer was comin' at me with when you knocked the legs out from under him with that iron bar," Thornton said, holding the implement up for inspection. "I'm goin' to shave. I must look like a hedge hog!"

"I'll see what luck you have with it," Carter grinned. "Maybe I'll stick with my beard. But we've got the blankets and

a set of oilskins that I grabbed up off the captain's bed. And up here in the bow is the bearskin that the engineer used for a bed."

"And I swiped a revolver and a couple of boxes of matches from the cabin," Judith added, producing them from the front of her waist. "I found the revolver on a shelf and decided that if he got any drunker and tried to pull off anything, we'd have anyway one gun on our side. And the matches I took out of the boxes and dropped into this bottle so they'd keep dry if anything happened to the boat. From the way the machinery sounded from that bunk down there I thought she'd fly apart any minute."

"It's too bad we didn't take that good rifle with us from the bidarka," Carter said.

"I thought of it just after I got aboard the tug, but it didn't seem important enough to chase after the Indians in that rough water. I thought we'd be in Skagway within a few hours."

"We could have used it all right," the girl admitted. "We're almost sure to run onto some big game in the mountains. But we'll get along all right. We'll probably run into some Siwashes before long."

"Speakin' of game, reminds me that I'm hungry no end," Thornton said. "Let's pick up some stones an' go in search of a bloomin' hare, or a grouse, or somethin'."

Judith glanced about. The view, foreshortened by fog, showed a narrow strip of gravel, steep spruce-covered slopes, and rocks rising straight up out of the sea.

"Let's shove on up the river," she said. "It'll be mighty hard hunting on those steep slopes. We'll find a better place, I'm sure."

Chapter XVII

Carter Gets His Answer

THE river channel was fairly deep and the dory, propelled by the two pairs of oars, ascended easily against the not too strong current. As they proceeded inland the fog thinned and finally vanished altogether, allowing their eyes to follow the timbered slopes to the skyline, far above.

"Some mountains!" Carter exclaimed. "I hope when we come to the head of this river we'll find a passable divide."

"We'll find a divide, all right," the girl said. "There'll probably be several forks, and there'll be a pass at the head of one of 'em. But we're not going very much farther in this boat," she added, pointing to the bubbles and flecks of foam that appeared on the surface of the river. "We're coming to a rapids or a falls before very long, and the boat's too heavy to portage around it."

A half mile farther on, perhaps three miles back from the coast, they rounded a bend to be confronted by a long apron of foaming white water that cascaded down over the rocks in a churning, roaring torrent that flung jets of spray high into the air where the huge drops sparkled like diamonds in the sunlight beneath an aura of rainbow-tinted mist."

"How extraordinary!" Thornton exclaimed, as the men rested on their oars and allowed the dory to circle slowly about in the wide pool at the foot of the fall.

"It's wonderful!" the girl exclaimed. "It's clean and beautiful, and — and friendly! It's not like the sea with its relentless pounding waves, and its everlasting nasty fog, and water you can't even drink."

Carter grinned. "I believe you're afraid of the sea."

"Of course I'm afraid of it! That's why I hate it and loathe it so."

"By Jove, if you were afraid, you never let anyone know it!" Thornton exclaimed, a gleam of admiration in his eye.

"I'd have died first!" the girl laughed.

"And with all the inconveniences we've had to put up with, to say nothing of the actual dangers we've been through," Carter added, "you haven't uttered a single word of complaint. I didn't know there were any women like that."

"I can't see where it would have helped any to complain about something that couldn't be helped. And it certainly wouldn't have helped to have nagged about this or that, when I knew that everyone was doing everything he could to make the best of the situation."

"No," Carter said gravely, "it wouldn't have helped. It would have hindered more than you know. We'll land here, and see if we can find something to eat. I'm about starved, and there seems to be a sort of plateau off to the left where we may find a few rabbits or birds."

They beached the boat on a low sand spit and carried the stuff to a point higher up from the water. "I'm going to spread out these blankets to air," Carter said. "They've got a sort of musty smell to 'em."

"It may seem like a musty smell to you," the girl said, "but if you'd been cooped up in that little cabin with 'em all night you'd know good and well that they actually stink! And you don't need to bother about spreading them out, because just as soon as we've had breakfast—or dinner, rather—I'm going to give 'em a thorough scrubbing, even if it uses up our only piece of soap!"

"Guess they need it, all right," Carter grinned. "I'll spread this bearskin out, anyway. The nights will be getting cold here in the mountains pretty soon, I imagine, and we're going to be glad we've got this robe."

"You bet we will!" Judith agreed. "The night's will be cold, and the days'll be getting colder, too. Here it's about the middle of September and we can expect snow in the mountains any time."

"Snow!" Carter exclaimed, with a glance at the girl's bare legs and dilapidated oxfords. "Good God! You can't go around in the snow like that!"

His concern was so genuine, so explosive, that the girl laughed. "I don't intend to. Not while I've got the material on hand to make good warm leggings and a pair of mukluks out of. And this skirt's about to drop off of me, too. I've got to either make a pair of pants, or else resort to a G-string—and the weather isn't right for that."

"But," queried Thornton, "how are you goin' to make leggin's an' pants, an' these—er—wapwaps, or whatever you call em? An' what will you do with 'em when you get 'em made—I mean the wapwaps?"

"Mukluks—not wapwaps," the girl explained. "They're Eskimo boots. There are four blankets. I'll cut up one of 'em for the pants and leggings, and I'll make the mukluks out of those oilskins, and I'll keep my feet warm inside of 'em with raw rabbit skins with the fur inside. We'll be killing rabbits right along—and there'll be the grouse and ptarmagin skins, too. Feathers are warmer even than fur. I'm sure glad I grabbed off this warm mackinaw of Lapointe's!"

"But what'll you use for thread?" Carter asked.

The girl pointed to the length of line fastened to the bail of the galvanized iron bucket. "I'll unravel part of that rope and have all the good stout thread I want."

Carter grinned. "You seem to know all the answers," he said, and turned to the Englishman. "Come on, Lionel—we'll grab up an armful of rocks and see what we can knock over for breakfast."

"Leave your knife here and I'll have the fire going," the girl said.

AN HOUR later the men returned with two rabbits to find the girl seated beside the fire deftly removing an appetizing slab of meat from the ribs of a five-pound fish. Three other similar slabs lay on a stone beside her.

"Wash up, and breakfast will be ready

in a jiffy!" she smiled. "I couldn't bake these fish like I did those on the island, because I couldn't find any clay. But we can run sticks through 'em and roast 'em."

"How did you get 'em?" Carter asked, glancing along the shoreline. "I don't see any shallow places where they could have got trapped."

"No, I got these out of deep water. Come here and look down into this pool." The two men knelt on the rock ledge and peered down into the water, clear as crystal and ten or twelve feet deep. There, lying close to the gravelly bottom, heads upstream, lay a dozen or more fish, their fins and gill covers gently moving."

"But—how did you get 'em?" persisted Thornton. "You had no fish hooks, and no spear! Why, I could be starving, and this pool could be full of fish—and there wouldn't be a thing I could do about it, if they stayed that far down."

"I snared 'em," the girl explained. "I learned the trick from the Siwashes when I was a little girl, and it's stood me in good stead lots of times. I fixed a loop of wire on the end of a pole, and slipped the loop over their heads, and yanked 'em out."

"But—where did you procure the wire?" Thornton asked.

The girl pointed to the remnants of a broom from which a length of the handle had been sawed. "I found that old broom under the seat. They probably kept it there to scrub out the slime after bringing a boatload of fish from the nets. I got enough wire off of it to make two or three snares. We can snare fish with 'em in the daytime, and set 'em for rabbits at night. Hurry up and wash—and don't go too heavy on that soap. I want it for those blankets!"

The four slabs of fish and the two rabbits were devoured, and Carter volunteered to help wash the blankets. "What they need is a good boiling," Judith said. "But we have nothing to boil 'em in. So we'll let 'em soak for awhile and then soap 'em good and use a rock for a washboard, and hang 'em in the sun. And we'd better be getting at it or they won't be dry by night. We'll camp here tonight, and push on in the morning."

"I'm goin' to shave," Thornton said, "an' then I'll cut the boughs for our beds."

"For our *bed*, you mean," corrected the girl. "The nights are going to be cold from now on, and we'll all have to sleep in a row and pull the bearskin over us. We'll have a blanket apiece to roll up in, even after I cut one up for clothing."

The Englishman produced the razor and eyed it dubiously, then appropriated the soap, ignoring Carter's suggestion that he use the broom for a brush.

"Here—give me that soap," said Judith. "You'll have to wait till after we rub it on the blankets. When we get a good suds you can scrape some of it off and lather your beard with it. That way we won't be wasting any soap." She turned to Carter. "Come on, let's get at 'em. They've soaked through, and we want to get 'em out to dry as soon as we can."

Thornton worked a handful of lather into his beard, and stood holding the razor helplessly. "I can't see my face, an' so I can't tell what I'm doin'."

"Kneel down and use the water for a mirror," Carter advised.

The man did so, but looked up very quickly. "My word! The water is movin'—an' the image of my face is jumpin' around like a bally dervish! I'll have to find a bit of calm water. There may be a pool downstream a piece."

Standing in water up to their knees Carter and the girl soaped and scrubbed the blankets, rinsed and rung them out and carried them ashore, where they spread them on the warm rocks to dry. "On the island," Carter said, "Lionel and I appointed Marshall to command the party, as he seemed to know pretty well what to do. But now I think you'd better take over. You know all the tricks of living in this country, and neither he or I do."

"I don't see why anyone has to be in command," the girl replied. "It was different on the island, with that horrible Lapointe there. But with just the three of us it isn't necessary. We know that all three of us will do everything we can to help."

"Guess that's right," Carter agreed. "You tell us what to do and we'll do it. You can depend on us."

The girl nodded. "Yes, I can depend on you. I was mighty lucky to be thrown in with men like you and Thornton and Marshall! Of all the chechakos on the *Malaspina*, to have been cast away for six weeks with men like you is too good to be true."

"Oh, I don't know," Carter deprecated. "I think most men are a pretty good sort."

"Do you? Well, you wait till you see how most of the chechakos behave when they hit the Yukon! And just think what would have happened to me if I'd been thrown on that island with men like Lapointe, and those other three—the one that Thornton nearly shook apart for spitting on his shoe—and his two companions. You remember we saw him deliberately smash his pal in the face with his fist and knock him off that spar—murder him right before our eyes—so he could have the spar to himself. I'd never have landed on the island with 'em; I'd have jumped out of the boat first!"

The engineer's lips tightened perceptibly and his fists clenched at the thought. "But we three were not the only ones you would have fared well with—there's your old friend Bettles, and Moosehide Charlie. If you'd been thrown in with them you'd have fared even better than you have with us. They'd have known more about what to do."

"I couldn't possibly have fared any better than I have—no matter who I'd been thrown in with. Of course I'd have been all right with them—they're sourdoughs."

Impulsively Carter reached out and took one of the capable brown hands into his own. "Judith," he said, in a low, strained voice, "do you know what I want more than anything else in the world?"

Her eyes met his for a moment, and her glance dropped as she sought to disengage her hand, then yielded it. "Why, gold, I suppose—or else you wouldn't be here."

"That's what I thought—six weeks ago when I boarded the *Malaspina* in Seattle. But I didn't know why I wanted gold. I know now. I want gold only for what it will buy—for you. The gold is only incidental—now. It's you I want. I've never known any girl like you—I didn't even know there could be such a girl!"

SHE withdrew her hand and Carter could see that her cheeks glowed under their tan. "Oh—don't! Not now, not here! Oh, don't you see how—how impossible things would be? We—we—can't let ourselves think of—of that—now! We're too close—we mustn't let ourselves go. It would—spoil everything!"

"But tell me—dear," Carter persisted, his eyes devouring her, "would you marry a chechako?"

She shook her head. "No," she said, softly. "I wouldn't."

"Never?"

"No—never."

"When does a man become a sourdough?"

"When he sees the ice break up in the Yukon," she replied, so promptly that he was taken by surprise.

"What?"

"That's what the saying is," Judith said, breaking the tension with a smile. "It simply means that a man isn't called a sourdough till he has wintered inside. Really a sourdough is a man who plays the game—no matter how tough the game gets. That, and the ability to live and get around under any and all conditions—conditions that would kill a chechako. A sourdough has the savvy to know the right thing to do—and the guts to do it."

"Do you think I'll ever make a sourdough?"

The smile widened on the girl's lips and flashed from her brown eyes as she answered. "Not till you've seen the ice break up in the Yukon!"

"All right. We'll leave it that way—dear. And in the meanwhile, I'll learn to live and get around under whatever conditions I encounter. And I'll play the game. I'll play it your way—and believe me, it's going to be plenty tough! If I were to play it my way, you'd be in my arms, right now, and—"

"Sh-sh-sh—I hear Thornton coming. He's probably finished shaving."

"Fine chap—Lionel," Carter said. "I believe he's in love with you, too—couldn't help but be. Your way's the best, if only for his sake. I'd hate like the devil to let him know—yet. I wouldn't hurt him for the world."

A slight smile twitched the corners of the girl's mouth. "I think he knows already. He isn't as simple as he sometimes appears."

"What! What makes you think so?"

The girl shrugged. "Oh—I don't know. Maybe a woman intuitively senses things that a man doesn't."

Chapter XVIII

When the Ice Goes Out in the Yukon

THORNTON appeared and both stared at him for a moment and then roared with laughter as he stood looking down at them with one half his face shaven and the other covered with a six weeks' growth of whiskers. Numerous cuts and gashes showed on the shaven cheek and neck.

"My word!" he exclaimed. "How I wish I'd never salvaged this bloody razor!"

"Bloody is right!" grinned Carter. "But you've got to finish the job. You can't quit now. You look like the devil!"

"I don't intend to quit. I had to stop for a few moments to rest my back an' my knees. Kneelin' there beside the river on a hard rock an' leanin' over to see myself in the water is one of the most tiresome an' unpleasant jobs I ever undertook. An' besides that the lather seemed to dry on the other side of my face an' when I went to wet it I knocked it all off.

Judith pointed to a large stone near the water. "You'll find what's left of our cake of soap in a hollow of that rock," she said. "It's only a thin little piece, and it's all we have—so go easy with it."

"And you can save your back and your knees," Carter suggested, "by dipping up a bucket of water and setting it on a rock about waist high, so you can look at yourself in it standing up."

"Haw! Now, why didn't I think of that? If I could prop the thing up edgewise I'd have a regular mirror—but all the bloomin' water would run out!"

"Guess you'll have to struggle along with a horizontal mirror instead of a vertical one," Carter laughed, as Thornton picked up the pail and the soap and went in search of a suitable stand for his mirror.

He turned to the girl. "One of your shoes has broken away at the side, and I noticed when you sat down that the soles of both of 'em are worn through," he said. "Don't you think you'd better get to work on those mukluks, or whatever you call 'em? The blankets aren't dry enough to work on yet, so the other things can wait. But you said you were going to make mukluks out of the oilskins."

The girl shook her head. "Time enough to worry about making mukluks when I need 'em," she said, stretching out her legs so he could see the soles of her shoes. "And my feet aren't on the ground because I made some tough bark insoles. The oilskin mukluks would be cut to pieces in

a couple of hours on these rocks. When the snow comes it'll be different. I wish I had a good pair of hobbed pacs like yours," she added.

"I'd offer 'em to you, except for the fact that you could turn around in 'em," he grinned.

"I could, pretty near. But how did you happen to be wearing 'em that day on the *Malaspina?*"

"They were the only foot gear I brought along. I tried to get an extra pair in Seattle, but they were all sold out. I got these in Denver. They look new—but they're two years old. You see, I got 'em soon after I got my diploma in the fond belief that a mining engineer would, at least occasionally, have to descend into a mine, and I wanted good serviceable boots. But my work was all done in white collar and oxfords, in a steam-heated office in Denver."

Little wrinkles of perplexity creased the girl's brow. "But—you know about mines, don't you? I mean, how to—to start 'em, and operate 'em?"

CARTER grinned. "My diploma says I do. And I've drawn hundreds of plans and sketches, and figured estimates and costs of every department of mining from shafts and tunnels, to stamp mills and cyanide plants. I can assay ores, and figure out drifts and stopes, and install elevators, and railways, and ventilating systems, and the hundred and one other things that have to be figured—but I've never seen a mine!" He paused and with a wide sweep of his arm, indicated the encircling mountains. "And I know rock. I know how to prospect for gold, and silver and copper and lead and iron and tin and zinc.

"And when I see you through to the Klondike, to Dawson, I'm coming back here and prospect these mountains. There's bound to be metal here—millions of dollars worth of it, just waiting for someone who knows how to come here and find it."

"And what will you do with it when you find it—if you ever do find it?"

"Do with it! Why—"

"I mean, about transportation?" the girl said. "This is a rough country. How will you get your ore out—or your machinery in?"

"Docks and a railroad, of course! Take this river, for instance. The cove into which it empties furnishes a natural deep water harbor suitable for building docks—and a railroad bed could be blasted out and graded clear up to the source of the river if need be."

"Yes, maybe. But all that would take a lot of money. Where's that money coming from? Where are you going to get it?"

"Why—Denver—San Francisco—Chicago—New York. There's always capital available to finance a really good proposition. The world needs metal—all kinds of metal."

"Yes, but isn't it true that the financiers take most of the profits? Especially where they'd have to make such a big investment as they would in here before they began to make any profit?"

"Yes, I suppose that's true. But—what can you do about it? They've got you right where they want you. You've got to have money to get your metal—and they've got the money."

"It doesn't seem right," the girl said, her eyes on the serrated skyline. "You do all the work—you live out here in the mountains like a Siwash for months, maybe for years, and when you find the ore, you locate the claim and record it. It's your ore. Then, you do all the work incident to building the docks and the railroad and the mine—and then operate the mine. And they sit back and take most of the profits, just because they furnished the money to finance the proposition."

"I didn't say it was right. But it happens to be the only way to do it," Carter said. Then he asked abruptly, "Wouldn't you like to live here in the mountains?"

Judith nodded slowly. "Yes, I'd love it! But I wouldn't do it. I wouldn't live out here like a Siwash just so some smug millionaire's wife and daughters in New York or Chicago who never did a tap of work in their lives can wear silk and sable and diamonds."

Carter was silent for what seemed a long time. "I hoped," he said, without looking at her, "that maybe—after I'd seen the ice break up in the Yukon, you'd come back here with me."

The girl shook her head. "No," she said, "I won't come back here. I've hoped that by the time you'd seen the ice break up in the Yukon, you'd stay — on the Yukon."

"But, Judith, I can't. Don't you see—there's nothing for me on the Yukon!"

"Oh—I thought, maybe there was."

He reached impulsively for her hand, but it eluded him. "You know what I mean—I'm a hard rock man! I know nothing about placer mining. I didn't come north to shovel gravel into a pan and fool around with rockers, and cradles, and grizzlies! This placer gold all comes from some hard rock source—and I want to find that source."

The girl smiled. "Maybe we can find it together," she said.

The man's eyes lighted suddenly. "Why, that's what I meant—when I said I hoped you'd come back with me."

"Not back here—nor any place where our work will be the means of making people we never saw, or even heard of, rich. Do you remember those samples I showed you on the *Malaspina?*"

"You bet I remember 'em! A man don't see rock like that very often. Those samples were high grade."

"And yet you've never even mentioned 'em, never asked me where they came from."

"Why, no. As I told you on the boat that day—it's none of my business."

The girl's eyes rested speculatively on his face. "I think," she said gravely, "that you are the only man I've ever known who wouldn't have tried every way he could to find out where those pieces of rock came from—if he knew, as you do, what they're worth. But suppose I make it your business—what then?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I found that rock and knocked off those samples myself, with the back of an axe."

"You!"

"Yes, and I don't know a thing about hard rock, either. I happened onto the ledge, and it looked different from anything I'd ever seen before. I could see what looked like little flecks of gold in it, and when I broke the sample off I found out they were heavy, so I took 'em along. I found 'em on Black Mountain, and my father owns Black Mountain!"

"Your father owns the mountain!"

"Sure he does. It's upriver from Dawson, and he bought the mountain from the crown for the timber that's on it. Dawson had started to boom, and he began cutting timber and sawing it into lumber, and rafting it down to Dawson. He made good money of it, too. I was up there prowling around one day, and I found that outcropping, and broke off the samples and showed 'em to him. But he only laughed at me and told me to go roll my hoop, and not to bother him with my track ballast! He wouldn't even look at 'em. He's a sourdough—a placer man. The only things in the North that he thinks worthwhile are placer gold, timber, and fur. And he's made money out of all of 'em. All the sourdoughs think hard rock men are a little touched in the head—and I guess most of 'em are. The ones, I mean, that putter around the rocks muttering about the mother lode. They're not mining engineers — just old men that are kind of queer."

"And do you think," cried Carter eagerly, "that he'll let me go in there and develop the proposition for him?"

The girl smiled. "Not until after you've

seen the ice break up in the Yukon, he won't! Of all the sourdoughs, Dad is the toughest about chechakos. In a way, you can't blame him. He's had to work 'em on his claims, and in the timber, and in the saw mill, and most of those who are content to work for wages are the riff-raff, the unambitious and the incompetent ones. The others are out prospecting for themselves. Of course they're not all like that—but most of 'em are. There are some of 'em who have used up their stake prospecting, and are only working for wages till they can save up another stake. They're all right. But for the most part, the chechakos are a shiftless, no-account lot, always soldiering on the job, and doing the work wrong when they do it at all. Saying 'chechako' to Dad, is like waving a red rag at a bull."

"Maybe if I were to go to him and explain the proposition, he'd—"

"He'd most likely tell you to get the hell out of there!" giggled the girl. "He wouldn't even let you get started, if you mentioned hard rock. He'd think that anything you'd do there would somehow gum up his timber operations."

"But good Lord—if there's any extent at all to that outcrop, he could take out thousands in gold for every dollar he'd take out in timber!"

"Yes! you know that, and I believe it—but just try to make him see it that way! I know Dad. He's counted a hard man—even on the Yukon, where most men are hard."

"But," persisted Carter, "we've got to make him see it. We've got to make him let me go ahead and develop that property. I'll work on any kind of a salary till I get it going."

The girl's eyes flashed. "Tom Carter!" she exclaimed, "if you mention salary to Dad, I'll never speak to you again!"

"Why, what do you mean?"

"I mean that we're going into this on a partnership basis or not at all. If you do all the work, you're going to get at least half the profit. And it won't be anything like as expensive there on the Yukon as it would be here. The steamboats that bring in the machinery and supplies can tie right up at the foot of Black Mountain. There won't be any railroads to build, and any old plank and log dock will do."

"But how are we going to get him to take a chechako into partnership—if he has such a low opinion of all chechakos?"

"We aren't going to. We're not going to mention the proposition to him, till you've proved that you're a sourdough. Then we'll talk to him—and he'll listen. And not only that, we'll make him put up the money to finance it — and keep the profits in the family!"

"All right," Carter grinned. "When does the ice go out in the Yukon? You bet, I'll be there to see it! And before the tail end of it's out of sight, we'll be hunting up your dad."

Chapter XIX

THORNTON STEPS ON A CORNICE

THE three slept that night on a bed of spruce and cedar boughs, huddled together, each wrapped in a blanket, under the heavy bearskin robe. In the morning they snared and roasted three fish, made the oilskins and blankets into a roll and the bearskin into another to which were affixed pieces of rope for pack straps for the two men. The girl carried the pail.

At the head of the quarter mile stretch of turbulent rapids Judith pointed to the charred embers of a fire. "Some Siwashes have camped here within a couple of weeks," she said. "We may run onto a village farther up the river. They'll be busy catching and drying fish for winter. After the snow comes they'll start laying in meat."

On the second day thereafter they came upon the remnants of another fire. "If their village is on this river it's still quite a distance from here," the girl said. "If it were anywhere close we'd find a foot

trail of some kind, and we'd begin to see net stakes in the stream."

"We may reach it tomorrow," Carter said.

For answer the girl sniffed the air, and pointed to the fast gathering clouds racing in from the ocean, obscuring the higher peaks. "Tomorrow we'll be holed up somewhere, and I'll be working on my winter clothes. There's snow coming. I can smell it. And we've got to keep our eyes open for a place to camp till it stops. We want a place that's sheltered from the wind, and it must be beside a deep and fairly still place in the river, so we can snare fish. The rabbits and birds don't move around much during a storm, and we'll have to live on fish and watercress till it blows over."

Late in the afternoon they came upon a spot at the foot of a fall where an overhanging rock formed a sort of shallow cavern that furnished excellent shelter from the wind as well as adequate protection from snow or rain. Peering over the edge of a flat rock, with their faces close to the water, the three saw that the big pool at the foot of the falls was well stocked with fish. The wind had risen to half a gale. It was perceptibly colder and the cloud bank had thickened until no peaks were visible above the valley rims.

"We couldn't find a better place to camp," the girl opined. "And we're not the first to camp here, either," she added, pointing to a pile of ashes at the mouth of the canyon, and a scattering of large bones. "The ones that camped here last probably fared better than we will. They had moose to eat."

While the two men worked at cutting boughs, carrying them into the cave for a bed, and laying in a supply of dry firewood, the girl skinned and roasted the single rabbit and half-dozen grouse they had knocked over during the day.

As darkness gathered the first flying snowflakes filled the air. They awoke in the gray of the morning to be confronted with a white, opaque world of powder-fine snow that cut off visibility at the cavern mouth, and swirled into tiny drifts on the bearskin that covered them. Muffled by the white smother the sound of the wind

and the falls reached their ears in a dull, all pervading roar.

In a sheltered corner of the cave Carter built a fire that threw out considerable heat, even though the acrid smoke eddied and swirled about them, stinging their eyes. He and Thornton sallied forth each with his bit of wire.

"Be careful you don't fall in!" the girl warned, as she set about unravelling the rope for thread. "You could easily step off the edge of that rock in this storm—and remember, the rocks will be slippery."

SEVERAL times on their way up the river they had stopped at pools where the girl had instructed them in the art of fish snaring, so they were not absolute novices as they cut their slender poles and affixed the wire loops to the ends. They soon found however that snaring fish on a clear bright day with the surface of the water untroubled was a far different matter from lying on their bellies in the snow, and trying to peer beyond a surface continuously troubled by wind riffles and falling snowflakes. For an hour they kept at it without seeing a fish, let alone snaring one. In vain they shifted their positions trying to find a spot that was sheltered enough to allow them to see beneath the surface. Finally Carter leaped to his feet.

"I'll bet I've got it!" he exclaimed.

"Got what?" asked Thornton, eyeing

him with chattering teeth. "By Jove, another hour of this an' I'll be frozen stiff! I've got no socks, an' no underclothin' to speak of, an' the bally snow has worked in next to my skin. It's deucedly uncomfortable, don't you know!"

"I damn well know," Carter grinned, "because I'm in the same fix. But we can't go back to the cave and tell Judith we've failed. We've got to eat—and it's up to us to see what we can do."

"Yes—but after all we can't eat a fish till we catch him! An' we can't catch him if we can't even see the beggar!"

"That's just it—but we're going to see 'em, and catch 'em, too! When I was a kid, and we wanted to see the bottom of a lake or a pond when the surface was riffled, we'd stick a length of stovepipe into the water and look through it—"

"Stovepipe, old top? Well, if you're goin' somewhere to procure a stove pipe, you might get me a suit of warm underwear an' some socks, an' a pair of gloves. An' why not buy a mess of fish, an' save the bother of snarin' 'em?"

Carter laughed. "You wait here till I locate that rotten birch tree where we got that bark for kindling last evening. I'll get the pipe, all right. You remember that section of trunk that lay on the ground was so rotten we picked it up and shook the wood out of it and had a tube of bark left. The wood rots, but the bark don't. "We'll use that instead of stovepipe!"

After some difficulty Carter found the tree, and after much fumbling about in the snow with his bare hands, succeeded in procuring a cylinder of bark some five or six inches in diameter, and three feet long. Hurrying back to the pool, he thrust one end into the water for a foot or more, showed Thornton how to hold it, and throwing himself onto his belly, peered into the end of the bark cylinder. Reaching for the snare he lowered it into the water and after some maneuvering, snatched out a six-pound fish. A half hour later they returned to the cave, half frozen, but with five sizeable fish—a two or three days' supply of food.

After a hearty breakfast, wood was piled on the fire and as the two men dried their clothing without removing it, they helped the girl with her tailoring, fashioning a couple of more needles out of the grouse bones of the night before.

THE storm let up toward evening, but the three remained in the cave for two more days, varying their fare of roast fish, with boiled fish, and soup made by boiling the fish heads with a quantity of water cress that Carter procured from a small spring creek that flowed into the river a short distance below the camp.

When they were ready to push on, Judith was clad in a pair of shapeless mukluks of oilskin over her stockings of blanket cloth that extended well above her knees, and a pair of trousers, also of blanket cloth. The cloth left over was cut into strips or bandages which the two men wrapped about their legs spirally, making a sort of legging that protected them in some measure from the cold. Neither had socks, as the cloth was found to be too heavy to allow their foot gear to be pulled over it. However, as the temperature dropped to only a few degrees below freezing, they found that they did not suffer unduly as long as they kept moving.

The eight or ten inches of new fallen snow slowed their progress so that when they camped at the end of the first day they estimated they had made only ten miles. The following day they pushed on, finding grouse and rabbits plentiful, and once sighting a cow moose as she crossed the river at a rapid and disappeared up a spruce-choked ravine.

They took turns breaking trail, and on the third day Thornton who was leading along a rock ledge well back from the river dropped suddenly from sight without a sound. Hurrying to the spot, Carter and the girl peered downward through a hole to see him lying ominously still and si-

lent, half buried in the snow some twenty feet below.

"He stepped onto a snow cornice," the girl cried. "See how the wind built it out three or four feet beyond the edge of the rocks! Oh, I hope he isn't—" She paused, as her eyes swept the foreground. "Come on, we've got to find a way down there. And keep back from the edge. I see a place ahead where the ledge slants down toward the river."

They pushed on, and twenty minutes later reached Thornton whom they found seated in the snow on a rough talus that slanted away from the foot of the ledge.

"Deuced nuisance, don't you know," he grinned. "Surprisin', no end—to have the whole world drop right out from under you! Must have passed out for a moment. Anyway, I don't remember anything about it till I found myself lyin' here with my face in the snow. I tried to get up, but I can't bear my weight on my right foot. It's the ankle—broken, or maybe only badly sprained. Anyway, I can't step without excruciating pain."

WHILE Carter collected wood and built a fire, Judith succeeded in removing the Englishman's shoe and spiral legging to disclose an ankle already swelled to nearly twice its natural size, and rapidly turning blue.

"It's going to be some time before he can set that foot to the ground," the girl said, as she and Carter examined the injured member. "Fill the bucket with snow, and we'll get a hot bandage on it and wrap it up in a blanket, and then we've got to make camp." When the task was completed the girl led the way into a nearby spruce thicket. "We'll make a wikiup in here," she said, "and move him into it. Then I'll hit out for help. There's bound to be some Siwashes somewhere in these mountains. We're right in the middle of the Chilkat country."

Carter's lips tightened, slightly. "How do you make a wikiup?" he asked.

"We'll make it far enough in so it'll be protected from the wind. It isn't hard. First we'll cut the brush and clear away the snow so we'll have a ten-foot circle of bare ground, then we'll bend over saplings from all sides and tie their tops together in the middle. That gives us a framework. Then we weave in spruce and cedar boughs till we have roof and walls snowtight. Then we make a hole in the top just to one side of where the saplings are tied together, to let the smoke out, then bank snow around the bottom and you've got a house that anyone can winter in—if they have to."

They set to work and before evening had completed the wikiup replete with its bed of boughs, and even a stone fireplace in the center. From time to time Judith had visited Thornton for the purpose of changing his bandages, alternating them from hot to cold. Then, supported by an arm thrown about the shoulders of each, the injured man was removed to the wikiup and put to bed. Over a fire outside, the girl roasted the three rabbits Carter had knocked over as he collected boughs for the building.

"Better do all your cooking outside when the weather will let you," the girl advised. "And remember to be careful of sparks when you have to build a fire inside.

"The trouble with wikiups is that they're inflammable as gunpowder—and they keep on getting more and more inflammable as they dry out. You won't have any trouble keeping in food. Grouse and rabbits seem more plentiful here than any place we've been—and the river is full of fish. Better keep changing those bandages as often as you can. I helped the doctor in Forty Mile take care of Camillo Bill when he sprained his ankle one time. I'll get an early start in the morning, and when I locate the Siwashes I'll come back with a dog outfit."

Carter nodded. "I'll slip out now and knock over something for breakfast before

it gets too dark to see," he said, and disappeared into the thicket.

CARTER had the fire going and three birds on to roast before daylight the following morning, when Judith joined him. She glanced at his tightly rolled blanket that dangled from a nearby tree limb by its shoulder straps. "We can't both go," she said. "One of us has got to stay with Thornton."

Carter nodded. "That's right," he said. "You're staying here."

"But you don't know the country! How will you find the Siwashes?"

"You don't know it, either. You've never been here before. And I'll find the Indians the same way you would—keep on going till I come to 'em."

"But you can't! You've never done any winter traveling. You'd never make it—you're a chechako."

"Maybe I won't be so much of a chechako when I get back," he answered, a hard note in his voice. "Anyway, I'm going; and you're staying here with Thornton."

"But you don't know the jargon. You couldn't talk to 'em if you found 'em."

"I'll make 'em understand, somehow."

"But the Chilkats—some of 'em—are—they don't like white people — they might—"

"Yes," Carter answered shortly. "That's what I heard you say back there on the island. Well, whatever they do—they'll do it to me—not to you!"

"Oh, please—"

"Don't start that!" Carter interrupted almost savagely. "You know damned well I'm not going to stay here and let you go off alone hunting Siwashes in these mountains! So there's no use arguing about it! I'm going—and you're staying here—and that's all there is to it."

The girl flushed angrily, bit her lips, and relapsed into silence. After a time she said, "You'll take the revolver with you."

He shook his head. "No, you keep it here. I'll take one of the snares and plenty of matches. One revolver wouldn't do any good against a village of Siwashes. I—"

"You'll do as I say about that!" snapped the girl. "It isn't what would happen in a village of Siwashes," she explained. "It's what might happen if you ran onto a lone one or a couple of 'em hunting or fishing. The Chilkats aren't all of 'em bad—but there are some bad ones among 'em. If you'd strike a village you'd be all right. There are enough decent ones to prevent the others from harming you. But if you'd run across one or two of the bad ones out where they thought they could get away with it, they'd murder and rob you in a minute, if they figured you had enough to pay 'em for their trouble. If they see that you're not afraid of 'em, and are armed, they won't dare to start anything. One white man is worth a dozen Siwashes, any day—and they know it."

"But how about you and Lionel? If I take the gun you'll be left here at the mercy of any Indians that might be prowling along the river."

"You don't need to worry about us! We knew there are no Siwashes below us on the river, and if any are heading down you'll run onto 'em. They won't travel far from their village with this snow as deep as it is. They'll wait till it melts. These early snows don't last long over here near the coast. A couple of days of warm wind and it'll all be gone."

CARTER thrust the revolver beneath his belt, and shouldered his blanket. "So long," he said simply. "I'll be back as soon as I can."

"Look out for snow cornices," the girl cautioned. "And remember that with only one blanket you'll be a lot warmer at night if you'll build a shelter wall of boughs and make your bed between it and the fire. The wall will reflect the heat back onto you."

Chapter XX

Mike's Village

TOWARD the middle of the second afternoon Carter's heart leaped at sight of a fresh snowshoe trail that led out of a deep ravine and headed upriver. He struck into it and made much better time in the track where evidently two sets of webs had pressed down the soft snow. An hour later he smelled smoke, and upon rounding a bend, saw a collection of low cabins and tepees that straggled along a narrow flat between the river and the rimrocks. Smoke issued lazily from stovepipes that protruded from the snow-covered roofs of the cabins, and from smoke holes of the tepees. A figure stepped from one of the cabins, walked to the river, and returned to the cabin carrying a pail of water. He pushed on, and a few minutes later was greeted by a rabble of snarling, barking, howling dogs.

Straight strain malamutes or huskies seldom bark, but the "Siwash dogs," descendants of the luckless thousands of mongrels brought into the North by chechakos to be abandoned when found worthless, and occasionally salvaged by the Indians and allowed to breed at will, present as motley a collection of yapping, inutile curs as are to be found on the face of the globe.

Heads were thrust from cabin doorways as the alarm sounded, and forms appeared as Carter advanced surrounded by the canine rabble. Loud shouted commands, backed by hurled sticks and chunks of ice dispersed the pack and sent its members slinking away to their lurking places among the rocks and spruce thickets behind the cabins.

Other figures appeared, and as Carter approached the group of fifteen or twenty men, women, and children that stared at him from before the doorway of the nearest cabin, he noted that most of the men were tall, well-set-up fellows with a yellowish tinge to their red-brown skin that gave them a curious dusky appearance. The women presented a more varied display. One or two leather-faced old crones looked as though their bodies had dried out and shriveled with age and the smoke of many camp fires. Others were full bodied and plump, several of the younger ones very good looking. They eyed him in silence as he paused before them; not, Carter thought, with the stolid indifference of the dull-witted, nor with the surly silence of sullen antagonism, but with the natural reticence of a people waiting for a stranger to make himself known.

Several children, their roly-poly, short-legged little bodies wadded about with clothing till they looked as broad as they were tall stood in the forefront, close against the legs of their elders and stared up at the white man with round black eyes, bright as jet beads.

One little fellow, not more than two years old stood directly before Carter, who laughingly stooped, picked him up, tossed him into the air, caught him and returned him to his feet squalling like a coyote. Several of the men frowned, but a young woman, evidently the mother of the youngster laughed aloud. Others giggled and pointed to the tot who was scurrying toward one of the cabins as fast as his short, fat legs would carry him.

Carter's eyes swept the assembly. "Do any of you speak English?" he asked.

The words were followed by a hurried consultation in the Indian tongue, at the end of which one of the younger women hastened to a cabin and returned a few minutes later accompanied by an old man, whose long white hair overflowed his

shoulders from beneath his carcajo cap. The crowd parted as the oldster approached and stood before the white man. He nodded, and offered a hand as hard as a piece of seasoned wood.

"'Ello. Nem Mike. W'at you nem?"

"My name is Tom."

"W'ite mans got nudder nem," replied the other.

"Why, yes—Tom Carter."

"W'ere you com'?"

Carter pointed downriver. "We followed up the river from the sea. We were on a boat—a fishing boat, and she ran on the rocks. There are three of us—another man, and a woman. The man fell down and hurt his foot." He stooped and touched his ankle. "He can't walk."

The oldster eyed him. "You no *pish* man," he said bluntly.

"No. We were on a fishing boat. We were going to Skagway."

"How long you com' oop de riv'?"

"About ten days."

"W'ere de man got de foot hurt?"

"Maybe twenty or twenty-five miles down the river. I couldn't walk very fast through the snow. I left 'em yesterday morning. We built a wikiup close to the river. I want to get someone to go back with me with a dog team or something to haul the man here on. We'll pay you well. We'll have to stay here till he can walk on his foot. We'll pay you for the food we eat—and if there's a cabin, or a tent we could get, we'll pay you for that, too."

The old man spoke rapidly to a younger man in the native language. After some discussion, he turned to Carter, "Kishomoko git man, you pay ten dolla," he announced.

Carter nodded. "Good. When does he want to start?"

"Heem go now."

AFTER a few more words in the Indian language, the younger man, a husky, six-foot specimen, gave an order to a young woman, and proceeded to one of the cabins. The young woman disappeared behind the cabins, and some minutes later she reappeared with seven dogs hitched to a sled. The man stepped from the cabin and fastened on a pair of snowshoes. He had drawn a light twill parka over his shirt. The snowshoes on, he picked up a blanket and small bag, tossed them onto the sled, stepped to the head of the dog team, uttered a guttural command, and moved off.

Carter started to follow, but the old man stayed him. "You no go. You tire. You no kin go fas'." He pointed to the white man's feet. "You got no snowshoe."

Carter hesitated. "I'll buy a pair, if anyone will sell 'em to me. How much?"

The oldster shook his head. "Dat better you no go. Kishomoko go fas'. Fol' you trail. Git de man an' de 'oman. Com' back tomor'. You stay here. You chechako. No kin go fas'. Kishomoko good boy. Heem git 'em."

The old man was right, and Carter realized it as he glanced into the intelligent face with the shrewd gimlet eyes that seemed to bore into his own. "All right," he said. "I'll stay. If I can rent a cabin for us to live in while we're here, I can be getting it in shape. Is there an empty cabin, with some kind of a stove in it? How much?"

A lengthy discussion took place among the Indians in which several of the women took part. Finally the oldster turned to Carter and pointed to the comely young woman whose youngster he had tossed into the air. "Tisna, say you com' her cabin. Her man dead 'bout wan year. Got nudder cabin for man an' 'oman w'en Kishomoko git back."

Carter glanced at the young woman who simpered coyly. "No! No! I can't do that! Where is this other cabin? I'll just move into it and begin getting it ready."

"Tisna say she lak you be her man," the oldster said.

"Tell her that when Kishomoko comes back the white woman will move in with

her, and I'll pay for her keep. I'll take the man in the other cabin so I can look after his foot."

"Tisna say you com' be her man you no got to pay—no got to work. She say she hont, an' feesh, an' trap, an' git de wood."

"Not by a damn sight!" Carter exclaimed, noting that the young woman was frowning. "Tell her white people don't do things that way! And you show me where this other cabin is so I can get to work cleaning it up."

After a short colloquy the old man said, "Tisna say a' ri'. Mebbe-so bye-m-bye you com'."

He turned and led the way to a small cabin a short distance along the line. "Kamyka gon' Dyea for pack w'ite man stuff on de pass. You tak' heem house. Good house. Got de good stove. Got two bunk."

As the oldster said, the cabin was a good one, and not overly dirty. "All right, I'll take it," Carter said. "How much?"

The old man deliberated. "'Spose *ikt* day; *ikt kwahta?*"

"A quarter a day, eh? All right. And you tell Tisna I'll pay her a dollar a day if she feeds the white woman well. And now I've got to get some supplies. Where can I buy a pail, and a frying pan, and some tea, and flour, and meat?"

"Got *pish*. No got mooch meat. Mus' got to hont de moose. Got l'il tea. Got li'l flour. Got de pail. Got *la poell*. I'm go git."

When the oldster had departed Carter lighted a fire from a supply of dry wood piled near the stove, and picking up a broom made of a bundle of spruce twigs bound to the end of a sapling with a piece of wire, proceeded to sweep the floor. But at the first stroke he ceased as a shower of dry needles left his broom almost bare. Unwiring the denuded twigs, he laid them aside for kindling, and rebuilt the broom, using fresh twigs he gathered from a nearby spruce. With the floor swept, he busied himself cutting spruce and cedar boughs for the bunks. Old Mike returned just as he finished, bringing a tin pail, a frying pan, half a pound of tea, and half a sack of flour. "Git *pish*. Pret' queek, we lif' de nets."

"How much?" Carter asked, as the oldster deposited the articles on the pole table.

The oldster pointed a horny finger at each article as he named its price: "Tea, *ikt* dolla. Pail, *ikt* dolla. *La poell, ikt* dolla. Flour, twenty-fi dolla."

"Okay—twenty-eight dollars," Carter said, and producing his wallet, handed the man three ten-dollar bills.

Old Mike took the money and examined each of the bills minutely. "T'irty dolla," he said. "Me, I'm no got two dolla."

"Keep it for the fish I'm going to get when you lift the nets."

The oldster shook his head. "No. Plent' *pish*. No git no money for de *pish*."

"All right—keep it anyway."

The oldster held the three bills uncertainly. "*Mika potlatch mox* dolla?"

"Sure—I guess so—whatever that is," Carter grinned. "Anyway, stick 'em in your pocket and forget 'em. And by the way—about this hunting and fishing. We're liable to be here quite awhile—till the other white man's foot gets well, and I want to help you people hunt and fish, and do whatever other work there is to be done. You show me how, and I'll help."

The oldster nodded rather vaguely as though he had not clearly comprehended all that was said, and turned away. Carter puttered around for awhile then threw himself down on one of the bunks, and soon drowsed off in the warm room. He was awakened in the early evening by old Mike who brought him two large fish all cleaned and ready for the pan, and a generous slab of bloody fat, evidently taken from a moose or some large animal. "*Mamook la poell,*" he said, pointing to the fat and the frying pan.

Carter nodded and smiled. "Sure—to fry the fish in. Thanks, Mike!"

Producing a small cloth bag from his

pocket the old man laid it on the table. "Salt," he said.

"Good! I forgot to mention salt when I gave my order," Carter grinned. "You're all right, Mike! How much?"

"No. You kep'."

"Well, thanks again. But after this don't bother to clean my fish. I can do it myself."

"Tisna gut 'em," the old man said, and took his departure. Dipping a pail of water from the river, Carter washed the fat, and fried one of the fish which he devoured to the last scrap. Darkness had fallen by the time he had finished, and wrapping himself in his blanket, he threw himself onto the bunk and was soon fast asleep.

TOWARD noon of the second day Kishomoko pulled in at the head of his team, with Thornton wrapped in the blankets and the bearskin, riding the sled and Judith Steele at the tailrope. The injured man was helped into the cabin and made comfortable on his bunk. As the three stepped outside Carter tendered the Indian a bill. The man took it and frowned.

"Wake ikt dolla! *Tahtlum* dolla!" he said angrily.

"What's the matter with it?" Carter asked, a puzzled expression on his face.

The girl smiled and, stepping to the Indian's side, pointed to the numerals on the bill. *"Okoke tahtlum* dolla," she said. But the man still seemed unsatisfied—still stood scowling at the bit of paper, and jabbering in the jargon.

"What's the matter with him?" Carter asked.

"He thinks you only gave him one dollar. He says you promised him ten dollars to make the trip. That's the trouble with these back country Siwashes—they can't get it through their skulls why, if one piece of green paper is worth one dollar, another piece the same size and color should be worth, five, or ten, or twenty dollars. You can't blame 'em for being suspicious. There are plenty of white men in the country that cheat 'em unmercifully."

"Here comes old Mike!" Carter exclaimed. "He knows the difference. I bought some supplies from him, and he knew the bills I gave him were tens. Tisna's with him, too. She's a young widow and I told Mike to arrange for you to stay with her."

The girl smiled. "You seem to have got along fine for one who can't speak their language."

"Mike can speak English after a fashion. He's a fine old chap. I like him."

After Mike had examined and approved the bill Kishomoko pocketed it and went smiling on his way, as Judith, engaged in a conversation in jargon with Mike and Tisna. The beady-eyed youngster had tagged along behind his mother, but at sight of Carter, he let out a loud squall and scampered back to the cabin. Tisna laughed and pointed at Carter. *"Kwass kultus tah!"* she said, and launched into quite a discourse, to which Judith replied with suppressed amusement. Finally the two Indians departed, and the girl smiled broadly.

"Tisna says the baby thinks you're an evil spirit, and is afraid of you—a feeling his mother evidently doesn't share. She told me her man was dead and she wants a man, and that she told Mike to ask you to come and live with her, but you wouldn't, and she can't understand why, because she's young and good looking, and is a good hunter and trapper and can chop much wood. I didn't know you were such a lady killer."

"Neither did I," Carter grinned. "I hope you told her to keep away from me and mind her own business."

"I told her the only thing that would keep her from bothering you. These Siwashes respect marriage. I told her you already had a woman."

The man stepped closer, his blue eyes shining into the eyes of brown. "I have,"

he said softly, "the dearest, most beautiful, and gamest—"

"Don't forget," interrupted the girl, "that you have yet to see the ice go out of the Yukon."

"Don't worry," Carter laughed. "When the ice goes out, I'll be there!"

"You better slip in and look after Thornton," she said. "I'm going to hunt up Tisna and see what kind of quarters I'm going to have. She looks nice and clean for a Siwash, and she's about my size. Maybe I can buy some clothing from her. These blanket pants and stockings right next to my skin are horrible, and the rope thread keeps breaking and cutting through, so I've had to work on 'em for an hour every time we camp to keep 'em from falling off me! And I wore out three pairs of oilskin mukluks on the way up here."

"While you're dickering, you might see if you can't buy me some socks and a pair of gloves, or mittens of some kind, and a gun so I can hunt and help get some meat. There's nothing but fish in camp, now."

Thornton's ankle had evidently suffered a very severe sprain. It was three weeks before he could set his foot to the floor. During this time he managed to hobble about the cabin, and upon the hard-packed snow of "Piccadilly," as he named the trail that ran past the cabins, on a pair of crude crutches Carter made for him out of spruce saplings. And it was five weeks before the tightly bandaged member was deemed strong enough for travel.

During this time Carter picked up a working knowledge of the Chinook jargon, and both he and Judith won the respect and regard of the Indians by their willingness to join in the hunting and fishing, and to help with whatever work was going on in the little community.

It was with genuine regret, freely expressed on both sides, that they finally parted, the three white people striking out to follow a crude map Mike had drawn for them that would take them to the Dalton Trail, some hundred miles to the eastward. The old man explained that when they struck the Dalton Trail they should proceed northward, and about eighty miles farther on they would strike the White River, and on Halfaday Creek, a tributary of the White, they would find Cushing's Fort, a trading post where they could replenish their supplies for the journey on to Dawson. He offered to send a guide with them, but they declined, as it would mean packing more supplies than the five dogs they had been able to buy could comfortably handle. So, with mutual expressions of good will and good luck, they struck off upriver.

Chapter XXI

WINTER TRAIL

THE three had remained at the Indian village for five weeks, and during that time much snow had fallen in the mountains. Carter had become proficient in the use of snowshoes, but Thornton, who by reason of his injury had had no practice, found them a bit awkward on the trail. They camped the first night at the junction of the north fork of the river at the source of which Mike assured them they would find a pass over the main divide.

Carter toggled and fed the dogs, cut stakes and arranged the skin heat reflectors that served as shelter tarps while Thornton cut boughs and arranged them for the beds. Then they all sat down to a satisfying supper of tea and pilot bread and moose stew that Judith had made the day before and packed in the kettle, needing only to be warmed up.

"This is rippin'!" Thornton said. "My word, a month ago I had almost despaired of ever eatin' anything but rabbit or grouse or fish, with an occasional cat thrown in for a tid-bit!"

"It wasn't so bad, after we got used to it," Carter said, "even without salt. But we've got a real outfit now—plenty of blankets and robes, warm clothing, cooking utensils, dogs and a sled, an ax, a gun,

a fish net, and plenty of grub. We've made about fifteen miles, according to old Mike's map, and with a hundred and eighty miles to go to reach Cushing's Fort, we ought to make it in twelve days. And we figured we had grub enough for eighteen days, if we help out a little with the rifle

and snares for dog food. We've gained five miles on our schedule today—supposed to make ten miles a day, and we've made fifteen. It looks as though we had an ample safety margin."

Judith smiled. "Let's hope it's ample, anyway," she said. "We've done all right today—but we've got to remember that Cushing's Fort is still a hundred and sixty-five miles away, even if Mike's figures are right—and a lot can happen in a hundred and sixty-five miles. The main thing we've got to be thankful for, so far," she said, turning to Thornton, "is that your foot didn't give out. If we had to carry you on the sled, it would slow us up seriously. These dogs are none too good. They've got about all they can comfortably handle, right now."

"The foot feels fine," the Englishman assured her. "I don't anticipate any trouble if I keep it tightly bandaged. As soon as I get the hang of the bloomin' snowshoes, so I can take my turn at breakin' trail, we'll get along even better than we have."

"I'll be satisfied with seven or eight miles a day through these mountains," the girl said. "After we hit the Dalton Trail we can probably make better time."

The old Indian's map ignored two further forkings of the upper river, so that at the end of the fourth day the three found themselves up against the impassable barrier of a thousand-foot slope, steep as the roof of a church. They retraced their steps to the first fork and ascended that branch to a perpendicular wall over which the water plunged in a hundred-foot fall. There was no possibility of scaling the icy cliff, and nothing to do but go back and take the third fork. On the eleventh day they topped the divide, and were according to the map, some thirty-five or forty miles from the village.

Moose were evidently scarce on the higher levels. They had seen no tracks since the first day. They had, however, netted fish for dog food.

ON THE twelfth day a blizzard set in that held them snowbound for two days in a spruce thicket on a plateau that skirted the mountainside for a mile or more, level as a railway grade. It was in this camp that, owing to Thornton's inexperience, they lost three of their five dogs. Two days before, at the noon camp, he had emptied the pail in which the dishes had been washed without removing the greasy dishrag which one of the dogs snapped up and swallowed as soon as it hit the snow. This dog now curled up and died, and on the first night of the blizzard when looking after the dogs while Carter and the girl made camp, he neglected to toggle them securely, with the result that three of them broke loose in the night, and in an attempt to raid the food supply, got into a fight in which one was killed and another ran away.

When the storm let up they pushed on, one breaking trail through the new snow, while the others pulled the sled with the two remaining dogs. They plodded steadily, grimly eastward. Old Mike's map was useless, indicating as it did from the divide merely a line with only two landmarks indicated—a mountain with three peaks, and a river with steep sides, neither of which they were able to find. They encountered no game, and with fifteen of their eighteen day's supply of rations gone, each

realized the seriousness of their plight—and each refrained from commenting on it, and from silly attempts at a forced cheerfulness that none felt. The situation was grim, and grimly and purposefully they faced it. All day they pushed on, not stopping for the noon meal, following the windings of a creek that must inevitably lead them to some larger river. Just as dusk was shading into darkness, Judith, who was traveling ahead breaking trail, uttered a sharp, glad cry.

"There's a light! A light in a window!"

Sure enough—there it was—a dull square of light that showed dimly through the heavily frosted pane of a tiny window. They redoubled their efforts, and presently ascended the bank to a flat on a bend of the creek in the center of which stood a little cabin of mud and poles.

As they stood for a moment looking at it the girl pointed to a pole platform near the end of the cabin. "The meat cache," she said, "is about empty."

Carter nodded as his eyes rested upon the pitifully small hump that bulged the piece of old tarpaulin on the platform, and stepping to the door rapped with his mittened knuckles.

The door opened promptly and an old man stood framed in the triangle of sickly yellow light. He was an Indian—a fine figure of a man once, Carter thought as his glance swept the huge frame now bent and twisted with age—and a handsome one, judging by the profile that showed momentarily in the dull candlelight. The man was speaking, and Carter realized, almost with a shock, he was speaking in English that showed scarcely a trace of any accent.

"Come in—come in! I'll look after your dogs. What—only two dogs? And a woman with you! It's lucky you found us—by the looks of your outfit. You've come far—and are short of grub."

"Who are you?" asked the girl, as much surprised as Carter was at the man's speech.

"I am Alex McKenzie," he said, closing the door behind him as he limped out, and stooped to fumble with the harness.

"Never mind," Carter said. "I'll take care of the dogs. Where'll I chain 'em?"

The old man pointed to a row of posts, from which chains dangled into the snow.

"Will your dogs bother 'em?" Carter asked.

"I have no dogs. My dogs are all dead. They grew old and then died. My wife and I are old, too. But we have not died. We are no longer of any use. It would be better, perhaps, if we did." The man paused and glanced toward the creek.

"Why—you came from the west! From the Chilkat country!"

Judith nodded. "Yes, we got wrecked on the coast and made our way to Mike's village. We were there for five weeks, and we've been two weeks getting this far—trying to follow a map Mike drew us that he said would take us to the Dalton Trail."

The old man laughed, disclosing a set of teeth, yellowed and worn down with long use, but intact. "Mike, eh? He is another old one—but not as old as me. He's a good man—about the best of the Chilkats. But I don't think he could draw a map that anyone could follow. You are twenty-five miles north of where you should be to reach the Dalton Trail from Mike's village. You should have gone by way of the Three Peaks. Come on, we will go inside."

A shower of sparks issued from the stovepipe that served as a chimney, and as the three entered, a leather-faced old crone was setting a tea pail to boil.

"This is my wife," the old man announced simply.

Judith returned the old woman's snaggle-toothed grin with a smile. "This is Tom Carter, and this is Lionel Thornton, and I am Judith Steele," she said. "I live in Dawson. My father is Bill Steele."

The old man nodded. "I know Bill Steele," he said. "A good man—and a

tough one. I can see now," he added with a smile, "how these chechakos got through from the coast."

Carter laughed. "You're dead right about that. If it hadn't been for Judith we'd never have made it."

The oldster nodded. "The north is a tough country for one who does not know its ways. There are many things to learn."

The girl regarded the old man with a puzzled frown. "You are no breed," she said. "Where did you get your name, and your education? Surely there were no missions in the country when you were young."

The oldster smiled. "I was with Robert Campbell on the stickine in eighteen forty, and with him at the Dease Lake Post, and I was with him when the Chilkats burned old Fort Selkirk at the mouth of the Pelly in eighteen fifty-two. Mike was with the Chilkats in that raid. He was a boy then. It was Campbell named me Alex McKenzie because he could not say my name."

"You are not a Chilkat?"

"No. My wife and I are Sticks. Take off your things, and we will eat. There is a stew in the pot. My wife will make some bannocks. We have tea, and there is plenty of meat on the cache."

The girl had laid aside her mittens and mackinaw and moved to the side of the old woman who shook some tea from a can into the tea pail. She glanced toward the man.

"There is not plenty of meat on the cache," she said simply. "And you have only a little tea left, and only part of a sack of flour. We will eat here tonight—but in the morning we will push on. We have grub enough to take us to Cushing's Fort."

The oldster smiled a bit grimly. "We are even now. We have both lied as sourdoughs lie. Each knows the other's heart. Even as you saw that there is little meat on the cache, I saw that there is little grub under your tarp. I have loaded many sleds, and I have traveled many trails. Two might make it to Cushing's with what grub is on the sled—but not three."

"And two might live here on the grub you have until more could be brought in—but not five. We must hunt tomorrow."

"I have a few snares set, and a net. I have seen no moose for nearly a month. There are moose on the river, a few miles below where this creek flows in, but for three weeks I have been laid up with rheumatism. I am better, now. We will not starve."

"How far is Cushing's Fort from here?" Carter asked.

"If you follow this creek to the river, and then follow the river, you would reach the Dalton Trail in about thirty miles. Then fifty miles along the trail you hit the White River. About ten miles farther on you leave the trail and turn up Halfaday Creek. It is the first creek that flows into the White from the north. And a dozen miles up Halfaday is the Fort."

"Just about a hundred miles from here, eh?"

"Yes, by way of the Dalton Trail and the White, it would be a hundred miles. There is a short-cut through the hills that I use. It cuts off forty miles. It is known only to me, and to Old Cush, and to Black John Smith."

"Could you draw me a map of this short-cut?"

The man shook his head. "No man could draw a map of that trail that another could follow. There are no rivers and creeks to traverse, but many to cross—and many divides. If I was able to travel I would guide you to the Fort. There are things we need. Without dogs one cannot pack a heavy load—when one is old."

AFTER supper the man spoke to the old woman in the Indian tongue and she began to remove the blankets from the bunk. Judith stayed her. "What are you doing?" she asked.

The man answered. "My wife cannot speak English. She is making our bed on

the floor. You can have the bunk. My wife and I, and these two men will spread our blankets on the floor."

"No you don't!" the girl cried. "Tell her to put those blankets back on the bunk. If she doesn't we won't stay here tonight! I'll spread my blankets on the floor, and—"

"And Lionel and I will spread ours outside," Carter interrupted. "We've got plenty of robes, and we'll be warm and comfortable. It will be too crowded if we all sleep inside."

He carried the girl's blankets in, spread the bearskin on the floor for a mattress, and bidding the others "good night," he joined Thornton who had stepped outside.

THE Englishman pointed to the moon that had just risen over a distant ridge —a lop-sided orb, a quarter beyond the full. "See the bally moon with that big circle around it. I've heard that's a sign of storm."

Carter nodded. "So have I. And I don't like the set-up here. If it storms we can't hunt moose, and the rabbits won't be running, so the snares won't do any good. We might get a few fish—but I doubt if there are many in this little creek. There are five of us—and there's damn little to eat."

Thornton shrugged. "That's true. But one can't do anything about a storm. If it's goin' to storm, it'll storm."

"It might last for several days," Carter continued. "I'm going to make a run for Cushing's Fort. It's only a hundred miles, and this time I can't very well lose the way—just follow down this creek, and then follow down the river, and then follow the Dalton Trail till I come to Half-aday Creek, and on up to the Fort. I can make it all right, and get some more dogs, and come back with a sledload of grub."

"But you'll be caught in the storm!"

"Well—so what? Even if I have to hole up till it's over, I'll be that much farther on. I can travel all night tonight, and keep on tomorrow till I have to quit. It's the only way, old man. In the morning you can tell 'em I pulled out."

"In the mornin' they'll jolly well find out we've both pulled out! You know mighty well what Miss Judith's told us about the danger of travelin' alone. An' while you an' the Siwashes were off huntin' Old Mike used to come over to the cabin an' talk, an' he told me many a tale of men bein' bushed travelin' alone, when two of 'em would have made it. An' where would I be if I'd been alone when I sprained my ankle? If you go, we both go!"

"But hell—you're not fit! Suppose your foot should give out?"

"Suppose—an' be damned to you! My foot's as good as yours. Come on—let's get started. There's plenty of grub here for the three of 'em. They could last a long time—what with the nets an' the snares, even if they don't kill a moose. Four wouldn't be so good. We can kill enough rabbits an' grouse to see us through with what's on the sled. Come on—we'll harness the dogs."

Carter fumbled in his pocket and pulled out a small notebook, and the stub of a lead pencil. "We'll scribble a note to Judith," he said, "and slip it under the door." He wrote rapidly for a few moments, tore out the page, and handed the book and pencil to Thornton, who wrote while the two dogs were being harnessed. Then, slipping the two pieces of paper beneath the door, they moved silently off into the night.

CHAPTER XXII

LAPOINTE LEAVES THE ISLAND

ALONE on the island Rene Lapointe watched the bidarka until it finally disappeared in the distance. Rage and disappointment surged up within him. Gone was his dream of wealth—the fond dream in which he had pictured himself spending his money with lavish hand among the hot spots of Vancouver, Seattle, and Frisco—sought after by beautiful women, envied by less fortunate among men.

In place of this rosy dream came the vision of a man, his face obscured by a black cap, dangling from the end of a rope in Sitka, as many people looked on and approved. He could see the man standing there on the platform of new yellow boards, beneath the gallows from which dangled the rope. He could see them slip the noose over the man's head and tighten it about his neck and adjust the knot under his ear so that when the trap was sprung and the man plunged downward to bring up sharply at the end of the rope his head would be thrown to one side and his neck mercifully broken—maybe.

Stark terror gripped him with the realization that it was he, Rene Lapointe, they were hanging! These men were putting him forever out of the world in which he so loved to live. His fists clenched, and he glanced frantically about him with terror-haunted eyes. His voice rose in a scream of abject horror, and he clawed at his throat with shaking fingers.

"They can't do that to me! They can't! Damn 'em, they can't! They can't!" Then his staring eyes encountered the wooden slab sticking up at the head of the low mound of sand and he knew in his heart that they would do that to him.

His eyes swept the island. He would hide when the police came for him. He would hide among the cedars, in some hole in the rocks—but even with the thought he realized it was hopeless. Carter and Thornton and the girl would come back with the officers—they would come back to show them which island he was on. And those three knew every foot of the island. Maybe, among all the islands, they could not again find this island. But no—maybe Carter or Thornton couldn't find it. They were chechakos, and to them, one island might look much like another island—but Judith Steele would know. Consciously or unconsciously, as she was being rowed back to the mainland in the bidarka, her brain would take note of the islands, and when the time came she would lead the police unerringly back—and they would arrest him, and take him to Sitka. And those three, Carter and Thornton and the girl, would tell in court of the killing of Marshall. And the men of the jury would whisper among themselves and, without leaving their seats, would pronounce him guilty—and again the vision of the platform of new yellow lumber and the gallows and the dangling rope.

He brushed a hand across his eyes as if to sweep away the horrid vision and walked over to the fire. The ashes and the sand about them were still warm—but they were also wet, and there was no single spark of fire. He felt in all his pockets. The first thing he had done when he reached Skagway had been to purchase a new waterproof match box and fill it with matches. But the box was in his coat—in the pocket of his new mackinaw. The girl had it now—the coat and the matches. The coat, his coat, would keep her warm while he, Rene Lapointe, must suffer miserably in the cold. She it was who had insisted upon putting out the fire. She was tough—hard. She was a sourdough.

With the realization that he had no matches, a new terror gripped him. No fire! He must eat his food raw from now on. And if no boats came within another six weeks, with no fire, no blankets, no coat—he would die there on the island, die horribly from exposure! The fall rains would chill him to the bone, then the snow would come, and the freezing nights. He had heard among the Indians, among the people of his mother, some of the old ones had spoken of making fire with a splindle

of wood, and a bow—but he had paid scant attention, putting it aside as an old wives tale. What did they mean by a spindle? And what had a bow got to do with it?

He realized that he was hungry. Gathering some stones, he walked back into the bush, killed a grouse, tore it apart, ate half of it raw, and finished his meal on berries. When night came on he burrowed deep into the pile of boughs that had served them for bedding, but the wind blew raw and cold, and without a coat, he shivered and slept only in short uncomfortable snatches. Next day it rained and prowling the bush in search of food wet him to the skin. That night he slept hardly at all, waking as soon as he dozed off, shivering—chilled to the bone. During the two ensuing days of fog and drizzle he watched for a boat—the police boat that would come to take him to Sitka. He knew now that when the boat came he would not run and hide. He would be waiting on the beach, impatient for them to land, and he would demand that they let him go below—right in next to the firebox where he would be warm—and he would demand cooked food—some bread and some potatoes and some cooked meat. After that they could take him to Sitka and hang him. Hanging, at least was soon over—and until they did hang him he would be warm—and they would feed him cooked food.

ON THE morning of the fifth day a smudge of smoke appeared on the horizon in the direction of the island upon which he had left his new rifle. The smudge grew plainer and after a time he could make out the hull of a boat. She was a small boat, evidently a fish tug. His pulse quickened with the hope that it might be some fisherman exploring among the islands for a place to set his nets. It might even be Pig Ambers and his two klootch wives, still searching for the girl in hope of picking up the fifty thousand dollar reward.

She was steaming a straight course for the island. It was not Pig Ambers. He could see now that the cabin and wheel house were painted white. Pig Ambers' boat boasted no paint above the deck. It was the police—coming for him—coming here to arrest him for murder—to take him to Sitka and hang him! The police had commandeered a fish tug. Panic gripped his heart and he leaped up from the rock upon which he had been sitting and ran for the bush. His cramped muscles moved stiffly and his sodden clothing clung about him with a deadly chill.

He stopped running and turned at the edge of the bush to glare, wide eyed at the approaching tug. He couldn't hide from the police—Carter and Thornton and the girl each knew every possible hiding place on the island, and they would be on the boat. Even if he should succeed in eluding them, what then? The police would go away, and he would be left here on the island to die miserably—to live for days, maybe even for weeks, cold and wet and hungry, longing for sleep, yet unable to sleep because of the deadly chill that penetrated to his very bones! Better to let the police take him. Hanging would be a merciful death compared to the death he faced here on this damned island. And at least, he could be warm and comfortable until he died.

A dull apathy took possession of him, and he turned and walked slowly back to the beach and he was standing there in the gray drizzle as the tug's anchor was dropped a hundred yards off-shore, and three men put off in a dory. The men were in oilskins and two of them rowed while the other sat in the stern. Suddenly the man in the stern stood up, gazed intently shoreward, and then pointed at him standing there on the sand. Lapointe could hear his voice as he spoke to the others, but he couldn't make out the words. The two oarsmen ceased rowing and turned in their seats to stare. Then they rowed rapidly toward him and beached the boat in the mouth of the little creek, beside

which he stood. The men did not look like policemen.

"Who the hell are you? An' what you doin' here?" asked the man who had sat in the stern.

Lapointe's heart leaped at the words. The men were not policemen—else they would not ask who he was, and what he was doing here on the island. Hope blazed anew in his breast, and his brain worked rapidly, as his lips framed his answer.

"I am Joe Gagnon. I was on ze *Malaspina* when she was wreck'. Seven of us got in a lifeboat, an' we lan' on zis islan'."

"We heard about the *Malaspina*. You mean you be'n here ever since she was wrecked? Hell, that was better'n a month ago!"

"Better'n six weeks—the way we heard it in Yakutat," supplemented another.

Lapointe nodded. *"Oui.* Mo' as seex week."

"Where's the rest of 'em? You claimed there was seven got away in the lifeboat."

LAPOINTE shrugged and pointed out to sea. "Gone. Dead. We stay on ze islan' an' patch up ze boat. Zen we try an' go back to coas'. But ze win' come up an' smash ze boat on ze rocks, an' ze res' all git drownded. Me, I'm lucky I'm got to de lan' agin."

"I'll say you be!" agreed the man who was evidently the captain. "But you don't look any too damn lucky, at that. You look like you was about froze, the way yer shiverin'. Ain't you got no fire?"

"Non. Got fire," Lapointe paused and pointed to the ashes of the fire Carter had doused upon leaving the island. "Zen ze rain put ze fire out. I ain' got no more matches."

The man regarded him in astonishment. "An' ain't you got no coat, nor no blankets, nor nothin'? An' what have you et?"

"No coat. No blanket. Eat berries, an' fish, an' rabbit, an' grouse."

"Hell—you mean raw?" one of the men exclaimed.

"Oui."

"Well I'll be damned!" the captain said. "An' the nights is beginnin' to git cold, too. You be'n all around the island—the shore—I mean?"

"Oui."

"See anything of a boat—one of these here fancy sailboats like dudes has got to sail around in fer fun?"

"Non. No boat on ze islan'. You los' ze boat?"

"Hell, no! Not us. Couple a fellas an' a woman lost her—wrecked her on some island, they claimed. Anyways that's what they told Captain Boggs an' the boys on the *Sally B.* There's somethin' damn funny about the hull business, if you ask me! Here comes Nate Yawkey an' Tobe Peters, an' Saul Titlow rowin' into Yakutat four days ago in one of the *Sally B's* dories, an' told how they picked up a bidarka out here amongst the islands damn near swamped, an' tuk a young woman an' two men off'n her. There was a couple of Siwashes, but they wouldn't come on the boat—paddled off hell bent jest as quick as the others got on the *Sally B.*

"Accordin' to what them three claimed, Captain Boggs bargained to take these folks to Skagway, after stoppin' into Yakutat fer to pick up a load of fish. He was headin' fer Yakutat an' along in the gray of the mornin', next day, these folks upriz an' tried to take the boat. They murdered Cap Boggs an' attacked Nate an' Tobe Peters, an' damn near got 'em, too. They had Tobe knocked out an' Nate down, when Saul Peters, not darin' to leggo the wheel to jine in on the rookus, run the *Sally B* on the rocks, him watchin' the fight instead of holdin' her offshore like he'd orta with the wind they had.

"This here was about ten, twelve mile south of Yakutat, an' the *Sally B* heeled over an' started to bust up, an' Nate an' Saul throw'd Tobe into a dory an' piled in after him an' started fer Yakutat—an'

them three in the other dory after 'em. Then a hell of a fog come up an' that's the last they ever seen of them three. Nate an' the boys got to Yakutat in the afternoon—but them others never did git there. They most likely didn't never git nowheres, what with the wind blowin' half a gale, an' the coast like it is. What happened, they got slammed agin' them rocks an' smashed to hell.

"BUT the hull thing is damn funny. Accordin' to Nate they claimed they was cruisin' around amongst the islands out of Sitka, jest for fun. But if they was, what the hell did they try to pirate the *Sally B* fer? The common run of dudes that sails around in them boats fer fun wouldn't have no reason to murder the captain an' crew of a tug that was rescuin' 'em—an' they wouldn't have the guts to, neither.

"Nussir—there's somethin' damn funny about it! What I figger, them folks wasn't no dudes jest sailin' around fer fun—by a damn sight! They had somethin' on that boat of theirn—somethin' worth murderin' a crew an' stealin' a boat to go an' git. It might be a cargo of licker to trade to the Siwashes—but that don't look like it was hardly worth murderin' a crew fer. So it must of be'n either dope er Chinks. Anyways, whatever it was, I figger it's damn well worth salvagin'. So when Nate an' Tobe an' Saul set out fer Sitka the next day on the *Sea Gull* fer to report the matter to the police an' the coast guard, I slipped out of Yakutat to hunt the islands fer that boat. Believe me, there's damn good money in dope er Chinks, if the Chinks would still be alive—er a cargo of likker, either. But a man's got to git there ahead of the damn police, er the coast guard."

The crafty brain of Rene Lapointe functioned rapidly as the tug captain talked. These were Yakutat fishermen, who evidently knew nothing of the reward posted for Judith Steele, as they had made no mention of it when he told them he had been a passenger on the ill-fated *Malaspina,* nor had they connected the young woman rescued from the bidarka with any reward. Nor evidently had the survivors of the wrecked *Sally B* connected her with any reward. But when these survivors reached Sitka to report the matter, they would learn that no such sailboat had put out from Sitka—and also they would doubtless learn of the reward posted by Sam Steele. They would then immediately connect the girl with the reward—and would undoubtedly make a play for the fifty thousand, either by getting in touch with Steele and telling him what they knew, or by instituting a search for the girl. It was evidently the opinion of these men, as it was of the men who now talked to him, that the three had been dashed against the rocks and drowned, inasmuch as they never reached Yakutat. Very likely, Lapointe thought, they were right. But even so, if he could be the first to reach Bill Steele with his own version of the story and convince him that he had actually been one of a party which had included Judith Steele, thrown on an island after the *Malaspina* wreck, Steele might be induced to pay at least part of the reward for the information. He must reach Bill Steele—and reach him before the survivors of the *Sally B* could reach him! And those survivors had been in Sitka for at least two days. Still, Sitka is not Dawson. Bill Steele was in Dawson. And there was no telegraph—he must beat them to Dawson at all cost!

CHAPTER XXIII

THE HALFBREED MAKES A DEAL

ONE thing puzzled Lapointe. Why had Carter and Thornton and the girl told the crew of the *Sally B* that they had been wrecked while on a pleasure cruise out of Sitka? Suddenly the answer occurred to him—the girl had found the clipping advertising the reward in his mackinaw

pocket! She knew of the reward and believing the fishermen also knew, she sought to hide her identity. Well—if they had managed to land in some cove along that uninhabited and little visited coast, only three courses would be open to them. They must make their way overland to some coastal village—and coastal villages were few and far apart, or strike inland to the Dalton Trail, or signal some passing boat to pick them up. If they struck inland for the Dalton Trail, the journey would take time. With any luck at all, he could reach Dawson ahead of them, starting from Skagway or Dyea. If they reached Yakutat eventually, or were picked up by some boat, they would immediately be arrested for the murder of the captain of the *Sally B*—and he could still reach Dawson ahead of the news.

The breed did not believe that the three had committed a murder—but they would be arrested on that charge, and before they could be released, he could be in Dawson, and collect as much of the reward as he could induce Steele to part with before locating the girl. Steele would institute an immediate search, and even if the girl was never heard from again, he would undoubtedly pay something for information as to where she had last been seen. The important thing, as Lapointe saw it, was for him to get to Skagway in the shortest possible time. He eyed the captain.

"Oui," he said, "zese people in ze pretty sailboat zey come to zis islan' mebbe-so ten days ago. Wan man' an' ze two Siwash, zey lan' for git fresh wataire. Ze boat she stay off shore. I say 'tak' me 'long'—but zey no tak'. Ze man giv' me som' match. Say he tell som'wan to com' an' git me. Say zey don' want no mor' on ze sailboat. Zen zey sail away."

"Which way did they go?" the captain asked excitedly.

Lapointe pointed toward the coast. "Zat way. I t'ink zey got som't'ing on ze boat zey don' wan' no one to know 'bout."

"Yer damn right they had!" cried the other. "Jest like I said—dope, or Chinks, er likker. They was cruisin' around amongst the islands waitin' fer a chanct to land on the coast, er mebbe waitin' fer some signal er fer some other boat to come an' transfer the stuff. Come on—jump in! We'll hunt around amongst the islands. That boat's wrecked somewheres, an' by God, I want to locate her before the damn coast guard does, er the police! If it's dope, might be a million dollars worth on her. Plenty in Chinks, too—if they ain't all dead. If it was only likker they had, there wouldn't be so much in it — but there'd be somethin'. Quite a bit if a man could work it off amongst the Siwashes."

Lapointe smiled. "Me, I t'ink you wast' too mooch time, you hont roun' de islan's. Mebbe-so coas' guard or police get zere firs'. Zat bes' we ron queek to Skagway. I'm know zem two Siwash w'at is on ze sailboat. Zey pretty tough hombres. Plenty *kultus.* I know w'ere zey live. I go fin' out w'ere ze sailboat git wreck, an' I com' back to Skagway an' tell you 'bout zat."

"You will! But, I say—how do you know they'll tell you?"

Lapointe winked knowingly. "Zey tell me all right. By God, zey no tell me, I kin git 'em hang. Zey know zat. Zey know I know 'bout zem rob two Chink, Yess Bay, an' keel 'em."

"By God, you do that an' we'll cut you in on the profits!" cried the captain. "Come on—let's git goin'. The coast guard'll be nosin' around amongst the islands. Prob'ly at it right now—but if we know where to look, we kin still beat 'em to it if we're lucky. I kin make Skagway by mornin'!"

Fifteen minutes later the boat was steaming full speed for Skagway. In his cubbyhole of a cabin, the captain uncorked a bottle and gave Lapointe a big drink. He took one himself and rasped the raw liquor from his throat.

"Yes, sir," he said, "you hit out an' find them Siwashes, an' find out where that boat was wrecked. Then we'll hit out there—an' in a couple of weeks time we're liable to be dividin' a million dollars! I got connections in Vancouver, an' I ain't afraid to run the stuff right in—I be'n fishin' in an' outa there fer years. They won't never suspect me of runnin' in no dope. The way I got connections—one time, couple year ago, I run onto a package of dope that had be'n tossed off a Jap ship with a rock salt anchor tied to it. They work it like that—make a waterproof package with a rock salt anchor to sink it an' toss it off jest before they git to Vancouver. Their pals is s'posed to pick it up when the salt melts an' the package comes up an' floats. But this time I run onto it 'fore they did. So I picks it up an' inquires around an' found a Chink that bought it off'n me—fifteen thousan' dollars, he give me. I found out later that the son of a gun cheated me plenty! I should a-got twict that. It jest goes to show you can't trust a Chink. But this time I know better. What I mean, if a little package like I picked up is worth that much, a hull sailboat full ought to fetch a million—even a little boat."

LAPOINTE nodded. *"Oui,* but me I go to Klondike."

"To hell with the Klondike! If you git in on a deal like this, you'll have all the money a man could spend without goin' through all that grief to git it. They tell me it's colder'n hell in there."

The breed shrugged. *"Oui,* she col', but I go. I'm hont de gol'—mebbe-so git rich. I no wan' to go Vancouver. You giv' me t'ousand' doller, I'm go fin' ze Siwash, fin' out w'at islan' de sailboat git wreck on."

"A thousan' dollars—yer crazy as hell! S'pose the Siwashes would lie? Er mebbe the boat ain't ashore on no island? Where'd I be then? Er what's to hinder you takin' the thousan' an' never tryin' to locate them Siwashes?"

"Non, I ain't do zat. Me, I'm hones' man. I fin' ze Siwash an' breeng heem to you in Skagway, an' he go 'long on ze boat, show you ze islan'. W'en I'm com' back to Skagway wit' ze Siwash you giv' me t'ousan' dollar, *non?"*

"Non is right! I ain't layin' out a damn cent till I git my hands on that dope!"

"Fi' hundred doller?"

"Nothin' doin'."

Lapointe shrugged. "Me, I'm go to Klondike. I'm lak I'm git zere 'fore ze freeze-up. I ain' got 'nough money. I mus' got to pack for mans goin' inside. I ain' got no time to go fin' Siwash. I go on to Klondike. If I git 'nough money to go inside so I ain' got to pack, zen I'm go fin' Siwash."

"Why, damn you—you'd run out on me like that, after me takin' you off'n that island where you'd froze to death in another week er anyways a month! What the hell's to hinder us heavin' you overboard right now? Who'd ever know the difference?"

Again Lapointe shrugged. "You t'row me overboard, you no git ze dope. Ze coas' guard git zere firs'."

The captain considered the proposition. "Tell you what I'll do an' that's all I will do, take it, er leave it. You go fetch them Siwashes, er one of 'em, an' if he'll go along an' show me that island, I'll give you two-fifty. That'll git you to the Klondike, an' it'll git me to the island where the boat is at. 'Course, even at that, the boat mightn't have nothin' on her—but I might git my money back in salvage. An' if that damn Siwash tries to doublecross me, I'll kill him—an' you kin tell him that!"

"All right. I git ze Siwash—you pay me two hundred an' fifty doller—he go wit' you, show you islan'."

"It's a deal."

At daylight the following morning the fish boat docked at Skagway, and Lapointe went across to the Chilkat village, and sought out the two Indians who had taken him to the island in the bidarka. They verified the story of the three being taken off in the *Sally B.* When they told him of landing and spending the night on the island where they left his new rifle, Lapointe demanded the gun, and they told him that the two men and the woman took it with them. He berated them for not helping him fight off the others after he had killed Marshall, and then turned to the one who understood no English and told him that there was a fish boat captain in Skagway who wanted someone to guide him out to the island and show him where Marshall was buried, as he, Lapointe, had hired this man to dig Marshall's body up and throw it in the sea, so in case he was arrested for shooting him, they couldn't prove he was dead. He offered the Indian ten dollars for this service, pointing out to him that it would only take two days and would entail no work—only ride out on the tug and show the man where Marshall was buried.

The Indian agreed, Lapointe paid him the ten dollars, and the Indian accompanied him to Skagway and aboard the tug, where the captain asked him in jargon if he could take him to the island where the men and the woman had been wrecked on the boat. Upon receiving assurance that he could, he paid Lapointe two hundred and fifty dollars, and with the Indian on board, backed away from the pier and put to sea.

Chapter XXIV

IN DAWSON

AT DYEA post Lapointe bought a packload of grub, and from an Indian he bought a rabbit robe, and with a hundred and sixty pounds on his back, hit the trail for the Chilcoot. In the hell-hole of iniquity that was Sheep Camp, he learned from men who had been turned back, of the rigid enforcement of the police order regarding supplies—a man must have a year's supply of grub to cross the line, and they called eleven hundred pounds a year's supply.

Undaunted by this disquieting information, Lapointe became a unit in a long ant-like line of pack-laden men who moved slowly upward on the thousand-foot catclimb to the Chilcoot summit.

In the confusion that reigned at the police camp of Summit, the breed managed to slip past the police, and in the semi-darkness of late evening dropped down the six hundred foot descent to Crater Lake, where he camped for the night.

At Lake Lindeman he threw in with a man whose partner had been killed the day before, as they were pit-sawing the last log for enough lumber to finish their boat. The man had been working the lower end of the saw when the platform collapsed and he was crushed by the log.

Working twenty hours, they finished the boat, caulked her, and set sail with a fair wind. Thus, as one of an amply supplied two-man outfit, Lapointe was not detained at Tagish. At Whitehorse he took a steamboat, and arrived in Dawson two days later.

During the two days on the steamboat he framed the story he would tell Bill Steele. He knew it would be impossible to claim the whole reward. For in the event the girl was never found it would not be forthcoming, and if she was found, he would face a murder charge the moment he appeared to claim it. He must get whatever he could for his information and disappear before the girl could be located. He wondered whether the fish tug captain had killed the Siwash when he couldn't take him to a wrecked sailboat? He shrugged—it would serve him right for not helping him fight off Carter after he had shot Marshall and knocked Thornton cold with the gun barrel.

He located Bill Steele standing at the bar of the Tivoli Saloon drinking with sev-

eral sourdoughs. Waiting till the group broke up, the breed touched the man on the sleeve, and with a jerk of his head, indicated an empty table toward the rear of the room.

Steele frowned as his eyes swept the other from top to toe. "What do you want?" he asked gruffly.

"I'm lak I'm talk wiz you."

"I ain't got time to set around chewin' the fat with breeds. If you've got anything to say spit it out. You can say it here just as well as you can over there. An' if you think I'll buy a drink, you can guess again."

"You put ze piece in ze paper 'bout you pay fifty t'ousan' dollar, you fin' out 'bout you girl?"

"Yeah—what of it?"

"Me, I'm know w'ere ze girl is."

"You—what!" The words exploded from the man's lips like a pistol shot, so that several stud players at a nearby table glanced up, and returned their eyes to their cards.

"*Oui*, I'm know w'ere ze girl is," Lapointe repeated.

Steele turned to the bartender. "Give me a bottle an' a couple of glasses," he ordered, and picking them up, led the way to the empty table. When they were seated with the table between them, his keen eyes seemed to stab the other's brain. "All right," he said in a low, tense voice. "Out with it! But just remember this—I'm a hard man to fool. In a case like this a damn hard man." He poured liquor into his glass, and shoved the bottle across the table. Lapointe ignored it.

"I'm on ze *Malaspina* w'en she was wreck'. Me, an' a man name' T'ornton, an' a man name' Marshall we git in busted lifeboat, an' bye-m-bye we fin' a man an' woman hang on hatch cover. Ze fog is all aroun'. We pull 'em in ze lifeboat, an' ze woman plug ze hole wiz ze clothes. We bail lak hell, an' ze win' come up, an' ze tide run out, an' we damn near git smash all to hell on some rocks. All night we row, an' in ze morning we come to islan' an' lan' in a crick. Zis islan' is far away from coas'. Ze win' an' ze tide an' ze rowing tak' ze lifeboat far away." He paused and poured a drink. Steele leaned tensely forward over the table.

"Go on!" he rasped. "You're on this island—what then?"

Lapointe swallowed the liquor. "Zen we

stay on ze islan' 'bout five week. We eat fish, an' rabbit, an' grouse, an' berries. All ze tam we look for boat. We lay ze fire on ze high rock so kin mak' ze smoke—but no boat come. Zen I'm say I'm tak' ze busted lifeboat an' try for go to coas' an' git boat to come. Zey say 'you git boat to tak' us off zis islan' we give you t'ousan' dollar.' I'm wait for wes' win', an' mak' ze tree in ze boat for sail, an' I'm go. I'm git on nuzzer islan', an' ze win' turn 'roun' an' I'm stay on zat islan' four, five days. Zen ze win' come from wes' agin an' I'm go to next islan', an' stay two day, an' zen I go to nuzzer islan', an' I'm fin' two Siwash zere. Zey got bidarka, an' I'm git 'em to come back to islan'. W'en I git zere ze men say zey fin' out ze girl is rich, an' we tak' her an' mak' her dad pay mebbe-so hundred t'ousan' dollar for git her back. I'm say zat no good, an' zey say zey mak' me stay on ze islan', an' zey tak' ze girl. So I'm shoot Marshall wiz ze Siwash gun, but ze other two, zey knock me down an' make ze Siwashes tak' 'em away in bidarka.

"I'm on ze islan' five day mor' an fish boat come 'long an' tak' me off. I'm damn near starve—damn near froze 'cause zey put out ze fire—an' I ain't got no matches. Ze fish boat mans say nuzzer fish boat name *Sally B,* pick up two men an woman in bidarka four days ago. Zey tell ze crew of *Sally B* zey git wreck on islan' wit' sailboat. Ze *Sally B* head for Yakutat for git fish—but w'en zey 'mos' zere, ze two men kill ze captain an' try to steal ze boat, but she run on ze rocks an' git smash all to hell, an' ze crew git away in one dory, an' ze men an' ze woman git in nuzzer dory. Ze crew git to Yakutat, but ze two mans an' ze woman, zey no git zere. Mebbe-so git smash up on rocks an' drowned—mebbe-so lan' on ze coas' an' hit inlan'. We come Skagway, an' I'm come here."

The man ceased speaking and for several moments Bill Steele sat in silence, his eyes boring into the black eyes of the breed.

"That's the damdest, cock-eyed story I ever listened to!" he grated under his breath. "Do you expect me to believe it?"

Lapointe shrugged. "Zat is ze trut'. You no b'lieve; I'm no kin help zat."

"In the first place how do you know this girl you claim you picked up off that hatch cover is my daughter?"

"In ze boat—on ze islan', we talk. She say her name Judith Steele. She say she live Dawson. Be'n away to school, two year. Here 'bout ze big stampede—come home."

"What color was her eyes?"

"Got ze brown eyes."

"Her hair?"

"Got ze brown hair, too."

"What was the man's name that you claim was on the hatch cover with her?"

"Name Tom Carter."

STEELE'S eyes were glowing with excitement now, and he poured another drink and leaned even farther over the table. "You've got a lot of things right—about her eyes, an' her hair, an' her bein' away to school for two years. Them things wasn't in that reward notice. But—"

The breed interrupted him. "Wan more t'ing—mebbe-so you b'lieve me." He laid a finger upon his forehead, just above his left eyebrow. "She got scar rat here. No big scar—li'l scar, shape lak ze moon."

"By God, that's right! She done that when she was just learnin' to walk—fell agin the woodbox. I rec'lect she bled like a stuck hog. You've seen her, all right!"

"Oui." Two men came in the door and walked to the bar. The breed pointed to them. "See zem two mans. Zey was on ze *Malaspina,* too. I see 'em on ze boat—an' I see zem talk to you girl—an' I see zem drink wiz Tom Carter. I tell you w'at Tom Carter look like—you ask zem if zey no see her on ze boat wiz Tom Carter." In a few words he described Carter, and Steele leaped to his feet, strode to the bar where Bettles and Moosehide Char-

lie verified the breed's words. Then he came back to the table.

"Accordin' to you then, you killed one of these men, an' the other two, that would be Thornton an' Carter, kidnaped Judith off that island an' then killed the captain of this *Sally B* an' tried to steal the boat, but she got wrecked. Where was she wrecked?"

"Ze captain of ze fish boat say ze *Sally B* head for Yakutat, but she don' git zere—but ze crew git zere in dory. Zey say she git wreck 'long ze coas' near Yakutat. You pay me ze reward?"

"Not so fast, I'm no damn sucker! I stand ready to pay fifty thousand in gold for her return, or information leadin' to her return—an' if I find her an' get her back you'll get every damn cent of it. I'll even do better'n that. I'm goin' to hit out now—today—for Skagway, an' hunt up the crew of this *Sally B*, an' make 'em take me to where the *Sally B* was wrecked, an' I'm goin' to start there an' comb every damn inch of that coast till I find where they landed, if they did land. Then I'm goin' to follow 'em till I find 'em! But if your story checks—even if I don't find her—like if she was drowned along the coast, I'll give you twenty-five thousand."

Lapointe nodded. "Zat fair 'nough," he said. "But you know I seen her—know I ain't try to tell you de big lie. Me, I'm broke. You gon' long tam mebbe—hont ze girl. I got to stay here till you come back for git ze money. I ain' got no money. Mus' got to eat—mus' got to—"

"Listen—I ain't got time to stand here an' dicker! The *Hannah* is pullin' out for Whitehorse in three hours, an' I'm goin' to be on her. She'll be the last boat to try it this fall—an' God knows if she'll make it, er git caught in the ice before she gits there. Come down to the bank, an' I'll pay you five thousan' on account, an' put it in writin' about payin' you the balance when I git back—twenty thousan' more if yer story checks, and Judith is dead—forty-five thousan' if I find her alive. Come on! By God I'm goin' to make that boat! An' I've got things to do first!"

"You kin no mak' it ten t'ousan'?" Lapointe asked.

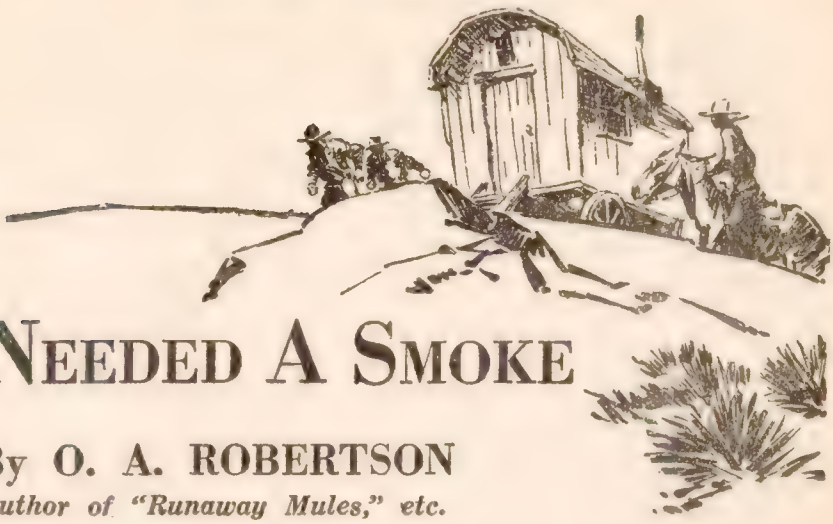
"I could—but I won't! Five thousan's all you'll need to keep you till I git back—more, too. You'll take that, er nothin'."

IN THE Dominion Bank, Steele paid over the five thousand and three hours later when the *Hannah* pulled out and headed her nose upriver, he was on her. At Whitehorse, he hired two Indians to take him up through the lakes, and ten days later he was in Skagway. Hiring a fish tug to run him to Yakutat he found the deck hand, Saul Titlow, who verified the breed's story as to the picking up of the two men and the girl from the bidarka, and of the fight in which the captain was killed, and of the wreck of the *Sally B* on the rocks south of Yakutat. Whereupon Steele hired the man to go along and point out the spot where the tug was wrecked.

By paying an exhorbitant price he held the tug captain to the exploration of the rocky coast, despite the danger from fall storms, and the following day nosed into the cove and explored the river mouth where the three had landed. Leaving the tug anchored in the cove, he and Titlow pulled upstream in a dory—and at the foot of the falls, found the *Sally B's* dory where Carter and Thornton and the girl had abandoned it. Pulling back to the boat, Steele got his rifle and .45 revolver, bought grub, and a couple of packsacks, and a rifle for Titlow, whom he hired to go inland after the fugitives with him, offering an ounce a day—big wages on the coast, but "goin' wages" at the time, in Dawson. Thus armed and accoutered the two struck inland, following the river, and so eventually they reached Mike's village—just ten days after the trio they sought had pulled out for the Dalton Trail!

(*To Be Concluded in the Next* SHORT STORIES)

Outlaws, Bullets, His Sheep—What the Hell When Barney Wanted a Smoke!



He Needed A Smoke

By O. A. ROBERTSON

Author of "Runaway Mules," etc.

FOR the twentieth time that morning Barney Whitney searched his pockets for a few crumbs of tobacco, and gave it up in growing resentment and alarm. He searched the distance for some sign of an approaching rider or rig, but only the gray and green expanse of sagebrush and aspen met his gaze. He cast his eye at the slowly climbing sun overhead. It wasn't more than nine o'clock, but already the sweat was making his undershirt stick to his body.

It looked like nobody would show up today—just as nobody had shown up for the past eight days. And his tobacco had been gone for nearly forty-eight hours. Dammit, he would go nuts.

Sheepherding, he had decided a week ago, wasn't such a bad job. It was easy work and good pay. But it must be one hell of an outfit he had chosen to leave a man entirely alone for over a week.

He forgot tobacco for a moment and glanced again at the sun, and then to his charges. He owned no watch, but he could almost tell time by the movements of his sheep. A few minutes before they had been spread out over an area of perhaps a hundred and sixty acres, and grazing as though each individual was staked. But now, in short, broken strings they were beginning to dribble toward a central patch of timber. He had observed that every day they shaded up like this from about nine in the morning until four or five in the afternoon.

Barney wasn't much of a sheepherder, and such as he was he had become by accident. In his career as a bindle-stiff, or migratory worker, he had held down a great variety of jobs. And so, rather needing the money, he had yielded to the pleas of a sheep foreman to enjoy what the foreman called, "practically a vacation," while drawing pay.

Each morning the sheep pulled away from the bedground before four o'clock in the morning. They shaded up through the middle of the day, and then grazed around until dark; coming to camp of their own accord.

It was really the life of Riley—as long as his tobacco lasted—except for two things. The foreman had warned Barney to be on the alert against coyotes, and he had never been able to really assure himself that the sheep would stay shaded up in the daytime. Where an experienced shepherd would have gone fishing during

that eight hours Barney watched his charges with an uneasy and suspicious eye.

His warfare with the coyotes was unremitting. The first day they had killed two sheep. Thereafter, he had always worn the old Colt's forty-five he had found in the camp, but though he often saw a coyote hovering in the distance he had never been able to maneuver one of them into range for a shot. But he did learn something about their habits.

THEY never approached the herd without first making sure that he was on the farther, most distant side. He decided that they never attacked the herd without first locating the herder. They had kept him most awfully busy. He tried hiding from them, but it didn't work. Sooner or later they smelled him out and attacked at some promising point of vantage. But it showed that they didn't attack until they got him located. And they'd sure have a busy time doing that if he wasn't around. He congratulated himself on a great discovery.

Anyway, he told himself, if the sheep continued to follow their regular routine he would have time to ride the ten or twelve miles into town and get back before they moved out of the shade in the evening. He hated to take chances, but he was rapidly getting to the stage where he felt that the one thing that would make a blissful heaven anywhere was just plenty of smoking tobacco.

First, however, he would have to catch the hoppled saddle horse which came up to camp each night and morning for grain, and grazed close to camp in the meantime. He had been a little wary of that horse. He was a big, leggy looking brown with a small head and a way of keeping his heels toward a man while he looked back at him out of reddish eyes with a wicked gleam of white.

"This here horse now," the foreman had told him, "goes with the camp, but you prob'ly won't need to use him. Just give him his grain twice a day to keep him hangin' around."

Barney nodded. He had worked on farms considerably during his checkered career, and knew a little about horses. But this brute looked like none that he had ever handled.

"He looks like a racehorse," he had ventured.

"That's right," the foreman grinned. "They run him in state an' county fairs around here for several years, till he got too tough to handle. Stampeder. He's all right unless somebody else rides up, and then he thinks there's a race on an' he goes away from there. Might as well try to hold a cyclone by the tail. We call him Dynamite."

Then and there Barney had decided to let Dynamite alone so long as it was possible to do the herding on foot. But that had been before he was out of tobacco. Now the prospect of another day without a smoke made even Dynamite seem inconsequential.

He had to go to camp to get a bridle. But first he had to fool the coyotes. Without bothering to bunch the sheep he made his way through the center of the herd to the patch of timber. Then almost reversing his course he followed a brushy

draw up and over the ridge. He could see Dynamite peacefully dozing in a clump of aspens well away from the sheep. Thought of the ex-racehorse running away with him through rocks and brush gave him a momentary chill, but he kept on.

A moment later he felt a surge of wild delight when he emerged from the brush a hundred yards from his camp. All his worry had been wasted—three saddled horses were tied up to the wheels of his camp wagon. But his delight was short-lived, and his consternation even wilder.

He had covered but a quarter of the distance when a man stuck his head out of the camp door.

Wham! Barney threw both hands in the air and leaped wildly to one side as a bullet struck the ground within a foot of his feet and threw up twin streams of gravel as it skittered away.

"Back in the brush, sheepherder," the man who had fired yelled, as he leaped to the ground, followed by two other men, one of whom also fingered a gun.

BARNEY was standing dead still. Bam! The other man with a gun took a shot. This time it was high, and Barney felt a warm current of air, and a vicious, whispering sound as the bullet fanned his face. He swore, elevated his hands still higher—but he kept on coming. If forty-eight hours without a smoke had not put him in a mood not to be frightened, it had, at least put him in a frame of mind not to be daunted.

"Get back in the brush, shep," the man who had fired first repeated, and this time there was nothing gleeful or jocular in his tone. He sounded as if he meant business.

Then the man who had not drawn a gun stepped in front of the others. "Let him come," he snapped. "What the hell do you fellows want to do?"

They were pretty hard-looking characters, although the man who appeared to be the leader looked more cynically amused than hostile.

Barney had heard vaguely of range wars, but the foreman hadn't warned him that anything of the kind was in vogue here.

At first he thought the men were cowhands, but they didn't look like any cowmen he had ever seen. Their faces sprouted several days' growth of beard from which a recent scrubbing had not removed all the grime. Their clothes looked as if they had been slept in more nights than one. They were all heavily armed, and each man sported a rifle on his saddle. In age they seemed to range from twenty-five to forty. The youngest and largest of the trio was the fellow who had fired the first shot, and it was he who now spoke.

"What's the matter, shep? Don't you know enough to take to the brush when a white man starts shootin' at you?"

"Yeah, I reckon I would—if a white man did start shootin' at me," Barney retorted in a tone which he knew was dangerous to himself. He lowered his arms.

"Keep your hands away from that shootin' iron, shep," the older of the three, and the man who had not shot at him, commanded tersely. "And don't git flip. Who'd you think you was slippin' up on anyway?"

Barney knew that his movements had been extremely furtive, and it would look to the men as if he were trying to slip up on them. He felt rather foolish. He did not care to admit that he had been trying to out-fox the coyotes. He remained silent.

"Take his gun, Thorny," the leader commanded, and the youngest man, holstering his own weapon, stepped forward and complied. He looked at the rather ancient old hog-leg with amusement, then hurled it as far as he could out across the bedground.

"I've often heard it was fun to be crazy," he said. "How 'bout it, shep? They say all sheepherders are crazy, so you ought to know."

"Let him alone, and let's git goin'," the

leader said, and reached for the makings from the fellow who had shot so close to Barney's head, and who had just finished building a smoke. The leader rolled and lighted his cigarette and passed the sack on to Thorny, who did likewise, and returned the sack to its owner.

"While we're all sociable and friendly like, what about passin' the tobacco around?" Barney suggested, and instinctively moistened his fingers.

"Buy your own tobacco, shep," the man said in a surly tone, and stuffed the sack back into his shirt pocket. The other two grinned broadly. They swung into their saddles and rode away with a warning to Barney not to try to get his gun until they were out of sight.

BARNEY was too disgusted and angry to give vent to even profanity. He retrieved his gun and came back to the wagon, The men had cooked and eaten breakfast. They had obviously spent the night in the open. He wondered who and what they were. Hardly cowmen, since they hadn't offered to molest the sheep. Perhaps they were just some smart-alecs out on a hunting trip or something, who had seized this opportunity to act tough—or they might be just what they looked—outright desperados.

Anyway, the very thought of them galled his soul, and he tried to dismiss them from his mind. Having not yet had his own breakfast he cleaned up the mess they had left and prepared his own meal. After that he needed a smoke worse than ever.

He picked up the bridle and started out after Dynamite. Whether school kept or not he was going to town. Another such experience without the solace of tobacco, and he would indeed be a fit candidate for the bughouse.

As he warily approached the horse, holding the bridle concealed behind him lest the sight of it should give Dynamite ideas of insubordination, the animal raised its head, took a few short, hoppled steps, then swung its rear end around toward Barney and waited.

"Afraid to face me, eh?" Barney grunted. While the horse's front legs were hoppled the hind ones were not, and the hoofs were steel-shod. Barney tried to circumvent this by making a circuitous approach. But, since Dynamite could operate within a shorter radius, the animal had only to make a few short, sideward steps to keep the wrong end always presented.

Finally, cursing softly, and ready to dodge if the horse lashed out Barney placed a tentative, seeking hand upon the beast's rump. He moved his hand up along the horse's backbone and ribs, and continued to swear, but in what he hoped was a soothing tone. Eventually he got up to the withers and neck, but when he tried to put on the bridle Dynamite swerved suddenly and in two leaps was ten feet away from the herder.

The same thing happened three times before Barney got angry enough to go up without the drawn-out preliminaries. When he reached the withers he looped the reins over the horse's neck, and when Dynamite swung around Barney swung with him. Soon he got the bit in the horse's mouth and the bridle over its ears. He hesitated a moment, but having been assured that Dynamite would not buck he slid on bareback. To his surprise the horse headed for camp at a fast walk. He put the saddle on, and not trusting himself to look at the herd again, headed for the distant town.

Mindful of his mount's propensity to stampede, he at first rode at a walk; then realizing it might be after dark before he got back if he held to that speed he put Dynamite to a trot, and then to a lope. Outside of throwing a kink into himself at sight of every little bird along the way, Dynamite was docility itself. Barney remembered the farm horses he had formerly ridden and began to relax. He would soon have a smoke.

THE town of Hannenburg lay at the end of a large, sparsely populated valley, but coming upon it from the open range Barney was less than a mile away when he brought it into view. Off to his right lay the valley, but intervening between him and the town was only a brushy plain with two parallel ruts of a dusty and poorly kept country road, and a turbulent, perpendicular-banked river which the road crossed on a narrow wooden bridge.

In the heat of mid-day the town from a distance had the appearance of being either asleep or deserted. But just after Barney crossed the bridge he was startled by a sudden and prolonged burst of gun-fire.

He urged his mount to a faster speed. Whatever the excitement it would be over before he could get there, but natural curiosity and a tingle of excitement urged him to get on the scene as quickly as possible.

The shooting continued. Dynamite threw the road behind him with long, greyhound strides. Suddenly Barney realized that the shooting was no longer in town, but was coming toward him even more rapidly than he was going toward it. Almost immediately three hard riding horsemen rounded into the road ahead of him.

The riders were half turned in their saddles, and were shooting back toward the town; but as Barney jounced to a bewildered halt one of them chanced to look ahead, yelled, and began to fire in his direction. A moment later all three of them were giving him more attention than they were whoever was on their tails.

Barney whirled his horse off the road and made for the brush. He had no more than reached it than a barbed wire fence barred his progress. Bullets whipped the brush about him, and whined in his ears like angry hornets, but his wildly gyrating mount and the obscuring dust made him a difficult target.

IT WAS only a matter of seconds before they had flashed past and were obscured by the dust of their own passing. Barney, however, had recognized them as his visitors of the morning.

Then, in the very wake of their passing, Barney found himself thundering along in the dust behind them. Dynamite, the ex-racehorse, sensing a race, had taken the bit in his teeth and bolted. Barney tugged futilely at the reins. The old racehorse was out to win, and there was no stopping him.

Out here thousands of passing sheep had made a powdery dust-bed of the road. It rose in clouds behind the heels of the running horses. Once it lifted just a little as the riders neared the bridge. Barney heard the thunder of hoofs on the plank bridge as the outlaws clattered across, and the dust lifted just enough for him to see the third and last man drop what might have been a lighted cigarette—only this thing was attached to a cluster of cylindrical objects which Barney recognized with a gasp of horror as a bound together bundle of dynamite sticks. And the fuse was most uncomfortably short.

The sheepherder had a vision of himself and his horse rising to the sky in innumerable small sections if they hit that bridge just as the dynamite went off. He braced his feet in the stirrups and sawed back on the reins. He knew now why Dynamite had been retired; the iron-jawed racing horse only seemed to run the faster.

Barney shut his eyes as the horse's feet hit the lumber. *Ka-lump, ka-lump, ka-lump,* Dynamite's feet pounded out on the wooden bridge, and then they went *ka-plop* as they hit the dust again.

The next instant the rearmost rider loomed hazily in the dust, and not two rods ahead. Dynamite was overhauling him like a scared tramp going after a slow freight.

Barney ceased to tug at the reins and then clawed for his gun.

He caught a glimpse of Thorny's strained visage as the fellow looked back and tried to point his six-shooter. The hammer clicked on an empty shell. All the accumulated rage and bad temper of the last forty-eight hours welled up within Barney like an avenging flood.

He saw the outlaw's stark terror as he spurred madly for speed that was not to be had; while Dynamite, with his trained and powerful stride swept alongside. Thorny opened his mouth to yell, but no sound came. He was half out of the saddle as the old hog-leg which he had so recently disparaged rose and fell, but not far enough to avoid the blow. He pitched headlong to the ground. His riderless horse flew the track and was left behind.

Behind sounded a tremendous boom as the flimsy bridge was blown sky-high by the dynamite Thorny had dropped. Barney had no time to guess whether any townspeople had gone up with it or not. Ahead of him the second rider was already visible in the clouds of whitish dust. The fellow was busily reloading his gun, and was not looking back. He yelled above the pounding of hoofs, but his words came in high glee. "That was our sheepherder back there, Thorny, did you notice?"

Again Barney's six-gun rose and fell, and again a riderless horse took to the brush and stopped.

Ahead was the man who had refused him a smoke, and here the dust was not so thick. Barney could see him clearly. He, too, was reloading his gun, and as he finished he thrust the weapon back in the holster. Dynamite, sensing victory just ahead, was rapidly closing the gap.

"Wonder if that crazy shep went up with the bridge. Did anybody see?" the man shouted back over his shoulder, and half turned his head. Recognition dawned in his eyes.

Right then Barney realized that he had still another problem confronting him besides the remaining outlaw. Dynamite had taken it into his head to run. How far and how fast he would go the rider had no idea. He only knew that he didn't want to go with him.

As they swept alongside, Barney leaned far over and threw both arms around the outlaw's body, pinioning the fellow's arms to his sides as he clawed for his gun. At the same time Barney kicked his feet out of the stirrup, and was left dangling in mid-air as Dynamite went on out from under him.

Somehow, Barney got his knees braced against the outlaw's horse's hip. For a few seconds he clung there like a cat; his chin boring into the back of his adversary's neck, with the fellow slowly but surely coming backward out of the saddle. Then with an involuntary howl the outlaw left the saddle, and landed face down on the hard earth with Barney's hundred and eighty pounds on top of him. Nor had Barney made any effort to break the full force of the fall. There was a sharp crack as the outlaw's arm, bent backward, snapped just below the elbow. The fellow's howl changed to a low moan of pain. His face was white when Barney jerked his gun out of the holster and threw it away. Barney jerked him to his feet, and told him harshly, "Git goin'."

"You crazy, bush-jumpin' sheepherder you can't do this to me," the outlaw gasped with his first returning breath.

BARNEY gave him an unceremonious thrust with his foot, and gestured back the way they had come. "Don't fool yourself about what I can do to you," he advised grimly. "I can do this, and that, and several other things. Git goin'."

"You've broke my arm," the fellow whimpered.

"I didn't mean to," Barney said. "I meant to break your neck. Git movin'."

As the man staggered down the road he continued to voice his opinion about his captor's sanity.

"I may be crazy, but if I have to leave you here while I go look for your pals I'll leave you in a way that you'll be sure to be here when I git back."

The outlaw lapsed into silence.

The outlaws' horses had got together and stopped. A few hundred yards farther on Dynamite also had come to a halt and was wondering about the sudden stop of an exciting race.

The second man Barney had knocked out, was still out. He had received a terrific smash, and the fall from his horse had done him no good. Barney collected his gun in passing, and went on to Thorny who was just beginning to sit up and groan. He made the man get up, and marched both prisoners back to the third man. All of them were for the moment too dazed to do other than look at each other with blank astonishment.

It was only a few minutes before a posse from town arrived on the scene. They had been forced to detour to a ford because of the blown-up bridge.

"What the hell?" blurted a tall man who seemed to be the leader of the posse as the scene broke upon his astonished view.

AS WELL as he could Barney started to explain, but the possemen gave him little attention, and devoted themselves to the prisoners. The leader of the posse went over to the bunched broncs of the outlaws and came back with a stout canvas bag which he took from one of the saddles.

"This is the loot all right," he said, as though still unable to believe the evidence of his own eyes.

"Will somebody tell me what this is all about?" Barney demanded. He was determined to draw a little attention to himself.

"Hell! Don't you know?" the man who had retrieved the money bag asked.

"The crazy damned shep still don't know what it's all about," Thorny said to his subdued associates. Then violent indignation assailed him. "If you didn't know what had happened what in hell did you want to horn in for?"

"I know you smoked me up a couple of times today, and I'm gettin' bloody well tired of it," Barney told him. "What else you was doin' was none of my business, but what you was doin' to me was gettin' mighty monotonous."

Faces assumed amused expressions, and then a man with less humor and more sense of the practical, stepped forward to explain.

"What these men did," he said, "is just held up the Hannenburg Bank. And if you want to know who they are, their names are Dart Billings, 'Thorny' Thornton, and Slip Dorgan. They're the worst outlaws in this part of the country. And if you want to know what it's worth to you there's a thousand dollars reward for each one of 'em."

"Well, shep, it sure must be fun to be crazy," Thorny commented, and Barney felt rather grateful for the interruption.

Other men were stripping the outlaws' saddles of their possessions and dumping them upon the ground. There was little that interested the possemen, but Barney's eyes lighted as they fell upon half a dozen sacks of tobacco. He took one and rolled a smoke, then put the sack in his pocket. Then, as nobody seemed to care or to take

notice he confiscated the rest of the sacks. He struck a match and inhaled a long, delicious draft of smoke.

"You say that reward is comin' to me?" he inquired of the man who had explained. "No foolin'?"

"No fooling. It's yours whenever you make application for it."

"How long will that take?" Barney asked.

"Not longer than a week or so, I imagine. If you like I'll be glad to act as your agent, and I won't charge you any commission. You see, I happen to own the bank that was robbed, and I owe you something on my own account. If you'll give me your power of attorney we can fix it right up."

"That's all right," Barney said. "I wouldn't want to collect any more than the reward. But could you fix up that paper right now—here?"

"Why, yes, of course," the banker said, "but if you'll just come up to the bank—"

"Well, maybe we'd better fix it here, if it ain't too much trouble," Barney murmured. "You see, I've got a herd of sheep back in the hills, an' I don't dare be away from 'em very long. I run out of tobacco and started to town for a smoke. But now I've got what these fellows had, an' I can pay them, an' they can git some more when they get back to town. I'd better get back."

Taking a pad of paper from his pocket the banker began to write, but he was interrupted by a heart-breaking moan. It came from Thorny Thornton.

"My Gawd! The shep come after tobacco," he moaned. "He asked us for a smoke an' that damned Slip Dorgan wouldn't give him one. What the hell is a sack of tobacco?"

The answer came from Dart Billings, the oldest of the outlaw trio. He was not a man given to humor, but there was a bitter, sardonic smile on his face as he said, "About ten years I reckon, the way it looks to me now."

When the trouble ended the captain of the "Banda" announced that if any other man asked him to put pearls in the ship's safe, he'd shoot him right off and be done with it. "Damn all passengers," he added. "I've always said they were a nuisance!"

Which was evidence of a pretty hectic passage of an otherwise ordinary tramp ship.

PEARLS ABOARD THE "BANDA"

An exciting complete novel in the next SHORT STORIES

by

CAPTAIN FREDERICK MOORE

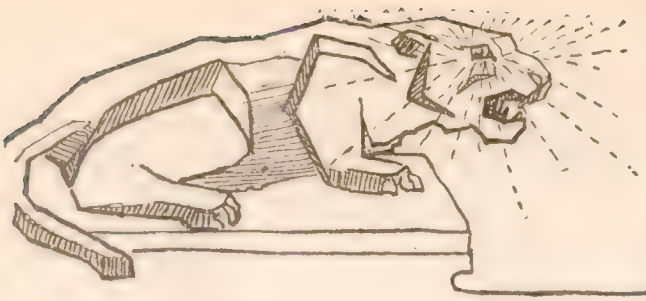
Curioddities By Weill

With a maximum **Wing Spread** of **eleven feet four inches**, the **Wandering Albatross** is the *largest flying bird!* It has the extraordinary power of "sailing" around a ship without any apparent strokes of its wings, and spends the greater part of its life winging its way on long travels over oceans south of the equator...

In **Bees**, the same egg, if fertilized, will produce a **female** *if not fertilized it will develop into a* ***male***

If pressed by hunger, **Arctic Sledge Dogs** will eat each other and a mother *will even devour her young born on the way!*

WHAT INSECT BUILDS A TRAP FOR ITS FOOD? *See Curioddities next time.*



GUNMEN VERSUS

By JAMES FRANCIS DWYER

WHEN I first pieced together the extraordinary bits of information concerning the four wanderers from Chicago I thought of sending a cablegram to J. Edgar Hoover, chief of the G-men. I felt certain that Hoover and his men would be intensely interested in the amazing narrative, and I believed that it was my duty as a citizen to put before them all the facts that I had discovered.

Two reasons upset this patriotic resolve. Firstly there was the matter of expense. I was, at the moment when the complete story of the quartet came into my possession, a temporary resident of Conakry, the capital of French Guinea, and cables from there to the United States are very costly. Of course I could have made the cablegram short, knowing well how clever the G-men are, but here the second reason blocked my good intention. Reportorial pride held me. I did sketch out a cold, bald message reading: "Bull Hannen, Slit-ear Louis, and Gyp the Greek rubbed out; Chicago Kate reformed," but its verbal paucity irritated me. I tore the cable form into shreds.

After reading this story you will easily understand that I could not force myself to compress all that I had discovered into a message of fourteen words. During long months I had collected at great trouble and expense a mass of colorful detail and I rebelled against a brutal condensation. I told myself that I had an amazing tale

LEOPARD MEN

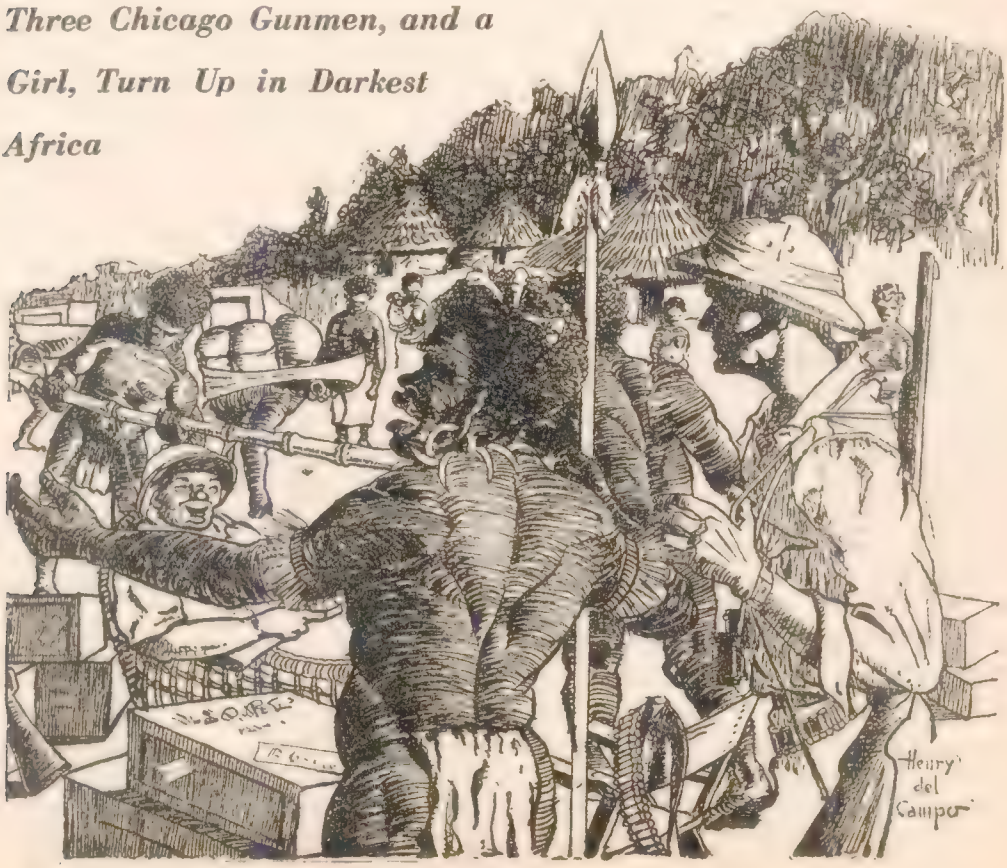
that ran up to the stars, and compression was criminal. What if Hoover and his G-men were still wondering as to the whereabouts of the three Chicago gunmen and the girl who had disappeared mysteriously?

They, the G-men, would suffer nothing but mild headaches in waiting for the details, but I would be robbed of the tremendous joy of the raconteur if I sent a niggardly cable.

Then there was Daniel-Frustration-of-the-Devil! I couldn't put his splendid chansons into a mean message. There was that verse concerning Jonah, which to me is a masterpiece:

"Jonah sat in de belly of de whale,
De whale he said: 'Dose Kroo-boys can sail
All roun' Mamba Point an' Cape Mesarabo,
But dere's no Kroo-boys as can do what Ah do!'
So ole Jonah fed dat whale some dates
An' he swam right ober to de United States."

Three Chicago Gunmen, and a Girl, Turn Up in Darkest Africa



I will, I told myself, as I stalked from the bureau of the Conakry *Postes et Télégraphes,* writes down the full and complete story of Bull Hannen, Slit-ear Louis, Gyp the Greek, and Chicago Kate. Write it down with all the thrills and horrors, then Mr. Hoover and his merry men can read it at their leisure.

AT a certain point in my researches I lunched with the captain of the *Padusay,* and I asked him if he had any suspicion that the three men were gangsters and the girl a gunman's moll when they came aboard his boat at Brooklyn with tickets for Monrovia, the chief town of the black republic of Liberia. The *Padusay* is an old trading steamer that makes a yearly trip to West African ports. Incidentally her skipper is one of the finest seamen I have met.

"Well," he said, smiling at my question, "my passengers are ninety per cent missionaries. I bring holy men and holy women out to Africa to wrestle with the heathen and I bring them back to the U.S. when their work is done. You can easily understand that I didn't size up the three men as Bible folk. They looked to me like gangsters on the lam, and the girl wasn't the type that concerned herself about the souls of niggers. But the four had tickets for Monrovia so it was none of my business. Do you know the motto on the great seal of Liberia? Hardly complimentary to the United States, but attractive to a running gunman. It reads: 'Love of Liberty brought us here'."

An incident of the voyage, related by the skipper of the *Padusay,* clearly proves that the gunmen had heard of the leopard totem before leaving the United States. Whether they had any knowledge of the "Leopard Men," the terrible *hommes panthères,* I cannot say, but they had evidently heard some garbled story about the golden totem of the playful devils who live in the dark hinterland of Liberia.

It appears that three days out from Brooklyn Slit-ear Louis asked one of the missionaries for the loan of a Bible. Needless to say the holy man hurried to oblige, and, wishing to make an impression on a person he sensed as godless, the missionary loaned a special morocco-bound volume that he was taking out as a gift to a newly converted chief of the Manos tribe.

Alas, the poor missionary's kindness was ill-rewarded. In Slit-ear's cabin the three gunmen started an argument while the Book was lying open at the thirty-second chapter of Exodus, and Bull Hannen clumsily upset half a bottle of rum which practically ruined the volume.

Slit-ear returned the Bible with muttered apologies. The good missionary, restraining his tears, asked the gunman if he had found what he was seeking. Slit-ear confessed that he had and he hadn't, and his answer gives proof of the pitiful ignorance of the three. Gyp the Greek, it seems, had asserted that an animal made entirely of gold was mentioned in the Bible, and the three wished to find out if by any chance it was the animal they were in search of.

"It's a golden calf that's in yore book," said Slit-ear, complainingly. "What we're after is a gold leopard. Bigger'n a calf. We got the dope about the leopard in Chi. It's a totem. Know what a totem is?"

"Why a totem is an emblem taken by savages as a badge or something to worship," answered the missionary.

"Well, that's what this gold leopard is," said Slit-ear. "T'anks for the book. Sorry we mucked it up."

Now the animal totem runs the length and breadth of Africa. Each tribe has its special animal that is supposed to exercise a benevolent influence on the clan in return for satisfactory worship. In the little huts you will find clay and wood models of the tribal beast, but the witch-doctors assert that the splendid golden originals rest in the jungle. There in secret places are the gold baboons, panthers, mandrils, hyenas, okapis, and other beasts, but these are visible only to the eyes of the witch-doctors

whose cult protects them against the devastating force emitted by the totem.

THE most wonderful of those totems is that of the Leopard Men, the human devils that inhabit the dank forests of Liberia. It is described as a huge crouching leopard of shining gold with eyes made of enormous emeralds, the light from which blinds all but the inner members of the disgusting cult. The Liberian Government is sensitive about the Leopard Men. The playful devils constitute a governmental skeleton that rattles loudly each time a squad of "Leopards" are rounded up and brought down to the coast for punishment.

Mr. Hoover's men will probably inform me that the gold totem was not the real incentive for the voyage of the four. Bull Hannen, so it appears, was suspected of the brutal murder of "Skinny" Davis of Van Buren; Slit-ear Louis was thought to have taken a leading part in the rubbing out of the Renardi brothers, while Gyp the Greek was eagerly sought in connection with the death of a compatriot in Humboldt Park. Even the dashing, golden-haired Kate was mixed up in a *narcotic* case.

Anyhow, whatever the cause of the great pilgrimage, totem or troubles, the records of the Republic of Liberia prove that the three gunmen and the girl arrived off Monrovia on the seventeenth of February, 1939.

"Off Monrovia" is the proper way to describe an arrival by steamer. No ship can approach the wharf. Vessels drop anchor beyond Mamba Point, and deft Kroo-men maneuver the surf boats that carry descending passengers over the dangerous bar into still water. West Africa has few harbors of any consequence.

This makeshift landing brought trouble. Chicago Kate was swept off the surf-boat by an unexpected wave and was only saved from drowning by the gallant efforts of two Kroo-boys. The boys believed that they had done a good job, but Kate thought they had needlessly damaged the Loop bought costume that she had donned to startle Monrovia. When the Kroo-boys demanded extra payment at the wharf she boxed the ears of the nearest.

The life-saver resented the attack. He kicked Kate on the shins with his bare feet, and brought on himself a vicious uppercut from Bull Hannen. A small riot started. Kroo-men rallied to the support of their comrade, and it took the combined efforts of seven colored policemen to rescue the four. They were taken along Waterside through a howling mob of blacks to the Hall of Justice to be questioned.

White Americans carry prestige in the dark republic in spite of that uncomplimentary motto on the great seal. The four Chicagoans were in funds. They put up the necessary guarantee required from all visiting foreigners whose later deportation might be costly to the state; carelessly tossed a few dollars to the black officials and they were free.

An American pioneer of the Firestone company who was in the court that morning described the four to me. His descriptions may or may not tally with those held by the G-men, but they are colorful so I reproduce them here. He said Bull Hannen looked as wicked as a marching army of driver-ants. His dead pan suggested the drawn shade of an undertaking parlor. He wore many diamond rings.

Slit-ear Louis, according to the same keen observer, was a jaundiced looking devil. Oily-skinned, thin-lipped, cold as a frozen snake. The helix of Louis' right ear had been completely shaved off, but the lobule, extraordinarily large, hung fearfully from the cartilage. Gyp the Greek was short and tubby. He was dressed in a Palm-beach suit and he irritated the black magistrate by calling him George. Gyp, in the days that followed, seemed to have supplied the humor of the party.

Chicago Kate, according to the Firestone man, was handsome. It seems that she possessed all the physical qualities that appeal

to a tired tropic-dweller. She had a rose and milk complexion, large blue eyes, and a red-lipped mouth that was busy making smiles to all and sundry. The Firestone man admitted that one would never mistake her for a sister of charity.

NOW the moment the four left the Hall of Justice they met Daniel-Frustration-of-the-Devil.

In lost ports throughout the world there is always a guide of the type of Daniel-Frustration-of-the-Devil waiting patiently for crazy clients. Sometimes the Daniels grow gray with the tryst but they never lose heart. They feel certain that the strange screwy tourist about whom they have dreamed will some day arrive and that they will be chosen as guide and counsellor for the expedition the screwy one has planned. Daniel, the moment his eyes fell upon the three gunmen and the girl, knew that his dream of mad travelers had come true.

Daniel was black, huge, and of immense strength. He thrust the clamoring crowd away from the quartet when they come out on Waterside. The four were his property.

He led them to a small hostelry, arranged for their comfort, then delivered himself of a short speech.

"Ah t'ink you come to Liberia catch some big t'ing?" said Daniel.

"You've struck it, bo," growled Bull. "We're after something hot."

"Ah knew," said Daniel. "Ah see it on yo faces. Ah say to mysel' dose white gem'men from America wiv pretty lady hunt somethin' big in ole Liberia. Like ole Balaam hunt de sweet potatoes."

"Who's Balaam?" snarled Slit-ear.

Daniel opened his huge mouth and roared one of his verses.

"Balaam he came out o' ole Mes-o-po-ta-mia
Ridin' a black mule, an' he said: 'Lord, here Ah are!'
An' de Lord said: 'Where yo goin' on dat dere mule?'
An' ole Balaam said back: 'Dey t'ink Ah'se a fool
Cause Ah'm goin' searchin' where de sweet potatoes grow
Back in ole Virginny where Ah came from long ago'."

"We're not searchin' for sweet potatoes," growled Bull.

"Ah know," said Daniel. "You gem'men are searchin' for gold. Nice br'ght gold."

Daniel's guess surprised the three. They were an untraveled trio. They didn't know that the dream of gold has been the driving force for every African explorer since the days of the Phoenicians set out from Tyre sacrificing black goats to Melkarth and asking for African gold in return for their sacrifices. They decided to question Daniel about the golden totem of the Leopard Men.

Daniel was a little upset by their questions. Personally he could give scanty information, but, lowering his voice, he spoke of a witch-doctor who lived in the ragged shacks of Krootown who knew a lot.

The witch-doctor had fled the hinterland because working for the Government, he had smelled out an influential Leopard Man and the fellow's relatives had made it too warm for an outback sojourn. If the three desired it, Daniel would make arrangements for an interview with the witch doctor for that evening.

To Krootown went the three and were introduced to a frightful old wretch wrapped in a gunny-sack. Perhaps Daniel in arranging the interview had whispered of the hopes of the three. It looked that way.

The horrible mummy asserted that he, while practising his profession in the hinterland, had actually seen the gold totem of the Leopard Men. On the sandy floor of the hut he drew a design showing a huge leopard in the act of leaping on its prey,

and in gasping whispers he spoke of its grace and beauty.

Seeing that he was making a hit he went into high. Of course it was gold. Yellow, glittering gold. And it had eyes of great green emeralds. Eyes that shone on the darkest nights. Eyes that were so magnetic that villagers walking along the forest paths were attracted by them and foolishly moved toward the eyes where the Leopard Men were waiting to spring on them and devour them.

To the gunmen it was a good story. The dark of Krootown pressed in on them and brought belief. There is no place in the world where the darkness is so dense and obtrusive as the Republic of Liberia.

They had difficulty in following Daniel on their way back to the hotel. They longed for the flares of Michigan Avenue and Dearborn. But there were no golden leopards lying around loose in Chi.

IN THE morning they held a consultation and decided on an immediate expedition into the interior. Daniel was to be head guide. They would go up the St. Paul's River as far as navigation permitted, them arrange at the villages for bearers who would carry them toward the hinterland. Liberia has no railway, and its sole road extends only fifty miles into the forest region. Beyond that point the white traveler must voyage by hammock and

bearers through tracks cut in the riotous jungle.

Monrovia was interested in the preparations made by the three gunmen and the girl. Timidly the black population watched. Of course the four were white Americans, and white Americans did things that were startling and unusual.

Now and then a Liberian called on his courage and whispered a warning. The three gunmen received it with insolence. Bad? Who were bad? The nigger tribes in the hinterland! Huh!

They laughed loudly at the suggestion that they, three gunmen from Chicago, would have any difficulty with a bunch of crazy natives. Monkey men. Sambos. Tarpots. Hell, these whispering fools didn't know who they were talking to!

They were filled with a desire to brag of their former exploits to these mild Liberians. Hard to control their tongues as they listened to the solicitous remarks of Negroes who made timid warnings about the trip.

"If dese ducks only knew who we are?" muttered Bull.

"Wanter tell 'em?" asked Gyp.

"Fun to frighten them," said Bull.

"Shut yer trap!" snapped Slit-ear. Slit-ear was close mouthed.

Chicago Kate laughed loudly. "They wouldn't understan' if you did tell 'em," she cried. "Go an bawl it out to 'em. Say I'm Bull Hannen who sent fifteen guys to hell an' with me is Slit-ear Louis who rubbed out a round dozen, and—"

"Smother that!" shouted Slit-ear. "Hell, you don't know if any of these might be an ear for a flatfoot."

"There are real Americans here beside us," cautioned Gyp, "Fellas gettin' rubber."

"Where d'you get rubber?" asked Kate.

"Outer trees, idjut."

One of the real Americans came along at that moment. He watched the preparations for long minutes in silence, then he spoke. "Going far?" he asked.

"Jest two or three blocks an' a scamper down the avenoo," answered Bill.

"So," said the inquirer. "There's a tale going round that you fellows are searching for Leopard Men."

"An' if we are?" countered Bull. "Is it anything to do with you?"

The other laughed. "No," he said, "but

if you make a good snatch you might keep me one."

The word "snatch" annoyed Bull. "Scram!" he growled, and the inquisitive one walked away.

The mind of the gunman has been studied by numerous psychologists who have come to the opinion that he is led to prison and often to the electric chair by vanity, ignorance, and retarded development. The three from Chicago had no idea of what they were facing in the forests of Liberia. Their poor weak brains could not visualize the dangers even if their vanity would permit them to do so. They were armed killers who had heard of a golden cache so there was nothing to do but seize the booty.

THERE is a belief amongst the better class Liberians that those emancipated American Negro slaves who were conveyed from the United States to Liberia by philanthropic societies in the years following the first exodus in 1822, might have acted more wisely for their descendants if they stayed at home. The truth is that the Republic of Liberia is a poor thing. Now, after ninety-three years as an independent state, it is a dump. The American-Liberian population is decreasing. Today they number only some twenty-seven thousand against a million and a half of depraved and heathen tribes. Monrovia, the capital is a smelly village of twelve thousand. There are no trams, no railways, no autobusses. Exports are principally coffee, rubber, piassava, palm-oil, and palm kernels.

Possibly the ragged, down-at-heel aspect of the republic gave courage to the three gunmen from Chicago. If the Negroes of the ruling class were a poor lot what must the native tribes be? At moments during the days spent in making purchases for the expedition into the interior they felt that they, if they were inclined, could take over the republic. "Just like Musseliny took over that other nigger joint," said Bull.

"We only want the gold animal," said Slit-ear. "An' the quicker we start the better. How do we know there isn't some other mob after it?"

The thought terrified them. They hurried their final preparations, bullied Daniel and four upcountry Negroes that Daniel had engaged, and on the fifth morning after their arrival in Monrovia, the three and the girl climbed aboard a rackety motor launch that was to convey them twenty miles up the St. Paul's River. Navigation beyond that point was impossible. They had sent word ahead demanding bearers at a native village on the bank, and from that point they would be carried toward the country of the Leopard Men.

The American who had joshed Bull Hannen was in the milling crowd that viewed the departure of the four. "Don't forget," he shouted, as the motorboat moved out into the stream, "if you snatch some nice tame Leopard Men I'd like one."

"Go to hell!" screamed Bull.

"Good-by Stanley," shouted the other. "Regards to Livingstone. Keep your paw on your rod."

They were on their way and felt elated. Daniel-Frustration-of-the-Devil was beside himself. This was the expedition that had filled his dreams. He sang loudly till they reached the native village where they would stay for the night.

The two huts that were allotted to them were dirty and flea-infested. The one occupied by Chicago Kate lacked a proper door, and, through the transparent strip of matting that acted for the purpose, half the village peeked at her as she made her toilet.

Kate lost her temper and banged the ears of some of the nearly-naked youths who fought for a peephole, but their desire persisted. A golden-haired lady with painted lips, plucked eyebrows, and darkened eyelashes had never before floated into their ken. Even the ancient chief of the village hobbled to the door of the hut to take a peep. In the native vil-

lages of Liberia there is no such thing as privacy.

IN THE morning the chief assembled bearers that would carry the four whites to the next village. Pedestrianism for whites is impossible in the black republic. The climate is hot and damp, and a promenade of a mile leaves a white exhausted.

On that first morning the quartet from Chicago became acquainted with trees. The surging, close-packed, enveloping trees of Liberia. Noted travelers from all over the world—Sir Harry Johnston, Durrant, Reeve, Lady Dorothy Mills, Sibley and Westermann—have commented on the frightening intrusiveness of the dank forests of the republic. Forests that are aggressive, extraordinarily fecund, obstructive, and fear-producing.

The traveler moves through a green burrow cut in the tree masses, while lianas like living tentacles reach out threateningly. Trees of a curious tropical kind. Great baobabs with bloated trunks and spindley branches, *carités,* which produce a vegetable oil of the consistence of butter; the poisonous "teli," or "gre-gre" tree, tamarinds, papaws, huge cotton-trees, and the strange *strophanthum,* the sap of which is used by the natives for poisoning their spears.

Now the three gunmen and the girl had never been very familiar with trees. They had carelessly noticed their presence in Lincoln Park, Lake Shore Drive, Washington Park, and other open places, but they had taken little interest in them. On car excursions from Chicago to Highland Park and Lake Forest they had casually remarked on the number of trees in the landscape, but those trees of Illinois kept their place, so to speak. They stood graciously at the roadside and waved their branches at successful gunmen and their girls who rushed by in fine big cars. They were well-behaved, apparently thankful for the morsel of ground in which to grow up, but these trees of Liberia were of a different order. They were arboreal gangsters, terrorists; with their creeper adjuncts they combated travelers.

"Hell!" cried Bull Hannen, staring at the masses of green. "These trees give me the willies!"

"Get the nigger to find a good road," ordered Kate.

Daniel shook his head when the command was given to him. There was no open road. The outback was threaded with little tracks like the one they were following, and there was no way in which they could escape the enveloping trees.

"Dey no hurt," said Daniel. He opened his big mouth and roared a verse from the Psalms: *"De trees ob de Lord are full ob sap; de cedars ob Lebanon which He hab planted."*

Bull unloosed a haymaker which Daniel dodged. Bull's nerves were bad.

At the midday halt Slit-ear brought up the question of attack. When they arrived in the proximity of the golden totem what would be the plan? A plain hold-up that they had dreamed about up to that moment seemed difficult now that they were in the thick forest.

"The old witch doctor said they drag it out on moonlit nights an' dance aroun' it," said Gyp.

"Well, it's an easy lay," commented Bull. "We'll jest chase 'em off an take it. No flatfeet, no G's, nothing."

They became excited as they planned the attack in whispers. The trees were annoying, but they were close to the treasure. A practically unguarded treasure. No police, no wretched radio cars ready to rush to the scene on a whispered word from headquarters, just niggers with old-fashioned spears and clubs. Not a rod amongst them.

Slit-ear thought it might have been a good idea to smuggle in a Tommy-gun. He thought it could have been done with small bribes to officials.

"We don't want one," said Bull. "They'll

run when we jump 'em. Look at the rats."

He pointed contemptuously to the nearly naked bearers who were squatting on their hunkers around a pot of rice which they scooped up with their fingers. Certainly the difficulties in the way of pulling off a job in Liberia seemed infinitesimal when compared with those that one might meet in Chicago. It looked awfully easy. The three and the girl, watching the poor wretches feeding, were possessed of a joint thought. Why hadn't some bright gunman from the United States thought of the plan before it drifted into their minds?

"'Cause," said Bull, "they stick aroun' the home joints. There's big things lyin' loose roun' the world. Fella told me about stuff in Lunnon. In a tower. Crowns an' necklaces an' rings belongin' to queens. He saw it, but he couldn't do anything. He was over there on his own dodgin' the Feds."

"I'd like the rings and necklaces," murmured Kate.

Daniel approached the four and begged leave to speak. They would reach a village in a few hours and Daniel had discovered from the bearers that the chief was an irascible old chap. If he was not approached with politeness the eggs, chickens, and rice which the expedition needed would not be forthcoming.

"But we've got dough!" screamed Bull.

Daniel admitted the fact, but the mere possession of money to pay for the goods was not all.

Daniel had noticed the brusque manner in which the four had said good-by to their hosts of the night previous, so he thought to offer a warning. The village chiefs believed that they were very important and they had to be flattered.

"Get t'hell," said Bull. "Line up the gang an' get goin'."

The four Chicagoans were amused at the suggestion that they should treat with respect a native who ruled over a village composed of two dozen miserable straw-thatched huts inhabited by nearly-nude folk lacking the faintest sign of intelligence.

THE chief of the village came out to meet the caravan. He was a dignified old man, slow of speech. He sat himself upon a wooden chair in the center of the village and he gave orders in a kingly fashion to his people. They were to find huts and food for the four whites and to treat them with all courtesy. Having given the necessary orders for the comfort of his guests and aware that he could not carry on a conversation with them the old gentleman gathered his ragged shirt around his bare legs and dozed off.

The idea came into the head of Gyp. Gyp the humorist who had annoyed the magistrate at Monrovia by calling him "George." He whispered to Bull and Kate. They grinned. Possibly the warning of Daniel as to the manner in which the chief should be treated stopped any objection that they might have made.

Gyp crept behind the old chief's chair, stooped, lit a couple of matches and placed them within an inch of the calloused soles of the ancient.

The soles were tough. They had never known a shoe, so the gunmen and the girl were amazed at the manner in which they withstood the heat. Gyp added two more lucifers to the fire, and giggling foolishly they waited. The naked villagers stood far off, seemingly awed by the actions of the visitors.

The chief moved his feet. He slid his right foot sideways. A match, still burning, became imprisoned between the big toe and its neighbor. He unloosed a yelp of surprise and anger and bounded from his perch. The three gunmen and the girl were convulsed with laughter.

The chief examined his foot, then lifted a wooden whistle that hung upon his chest. He blew three short blasts upon it.

There came to the ears of the four whites the shuffling of bare feet on the sunbaked ground. To their surprised eyes

the huts vomited men, women and children. It was near dusk, and the unclothed figures looked like phantoms against the background of the encircling forest.

Silently, noiselessly, they moved into the green undergrowth, and the undergrowth absorbed them. Like a million green lips it took them. Legs, arms, and weaving bodies. They disappeared. In three minutes the village was deserted, except for the four whites, Daniel, and his serving squad, and the bearers that had carried the hammocks.

Bull gasped, Slit-ear and Gyp the Greek made blasphemous sounds, Chicago Kate was taken with a fit of hysterical laughter.

Bull Hannen demanded an explanation from Daniel. "Ole chief him pretty mad 'cause him get hot foot," said Daniel.

"It was jest a bit o' fun!" roared Bull.

"He no like fun," muttered Daniel. "Him a very seeryus chief."

"How long will he stay in the bushes?" asked Bull.

Daniel shrugged his shoulders. "Too much time," he said sadly. "He no come out till we go."

The three gunmen stared at each other in amazement. There was something particularly eerie in the sudden and silent disappearance of the tribe. It was serpent-like; frightening in its fluidity. And now the Liberian night was rolling down on the party.

A quick search of the huts increased the temper of the Chicagoans. The fleeing villagers, with miraculous swiftness, had gathered up everything edible as they moved. Eggs, meal, chickens, and plantains had gone with them. There was nothing eatable in the village.

Gyp the Greek pulled his gun and made a motion as if to fire into the surrounding undergrowth, but Daniel fell upon his knees in front of the gunman and begged him not to fire. There was, to Daniel, the frightening possibility of a stray bullet hitting the chief.

"Dey is all dere roun' us!" cried Daniel.

"Then tell 'em to come out!" snapped Gyp.

Daniel opened his wide mouth and addressed the forest. He spoke in the language of the villagers. He informed the chief that the white visitor meant no harm. It was just a little bit of playfulness on his part and was not intended as an insult to the dignity of the village head. It was a good plea.

No answer came from the forest. Silence, broken only by the scurrying of monkeys. The chief, if he heard, refused to accept the apology.

Daniel's little regiment, helped by the bearers, built fires, and at one of these sat the white quartet. Possibly the first real cold douche of fear fell upon the four that evening.

Liberia—Africa was attacking. A monster green-eyed spider, attracted by the blaze, came and startled Kate. The spider stood up straight on his huge hairy legs and in size and manner was immensely terrifying.

Slit-ear killed him, but Slit-ear in turn was frightened out of his wits by a wandering out-size scorpion that thought to climb up his leg.

Daniel-Frustration-of-the-Devil tried to fight the dreadful silence with song. His bass voice roared through the empty huts and went out over the dark forests.

"Ole Ham, de son o' Noah, wuz a black-
man, he
Lived wit' his fam'ly on de Mississippi;
He had nine t'ousand chillen, an' de
moment dey wuz born,
Dey caught de catfish an' dey hoed de corn,
Never had a moment to dance or pray
So dey came right ober Africa way."

"Shut yer trap!" roared Bull.

"No, let him sing!" protested Kate. "It chases away the horrors."

So Daniel sang on through the slow-moving hours.

"Ole Ham he fixed a Declaration o' de Liberty,
Jest like George Washington when he cut free,
He made de first President, Mister Joe Roberts was his name,
An' shiploads o' niggers from de United States came,
An' dey ate fried chicken an' danced roun' de baobab tree
Cause dey 'd nebber go back to der Mississippi."

MORNING brought no change in the situation. No sign of the villagers.

Bull Hannen suggested that the hammock bearers of the previous day should continue with them to the next village, but Daniel explained that this was entirely contrary to the carrying laws of the country. Bearers from one village carried their employers only to the next settlement where new bearers took up the work.

Bull said the rule was nonsense. Daniel should inform the sixteen natives that they were to carry on because there were no others to take their place.

Daniel passed on the order, and the effect was surprising. The sixteen glanced at each other, then, with one accord, they fled down the track leading back to their village. Bull fired a shot or two at their bare sterns, but the firing only increased their speed.

"Dey don't like de peoples in de next village," explained Daniel. "Dey say dere is no buryin' groun' dere."

"What difference does that make to them?" asked Slit-ear.

Daniel tried to dodge the question, but Slit-ear pressed for an answer. "Dey don't bury de men dat die," said Daniel.

"What do they do with 'em?"

"Eat 'em. Dey are not de real Leopard Men, but dey is pretty close."

"And are we that near to the golden totem?" asked Gyp.

"Two or three villages," answered Daniel.

The gunmen held a consultation. The action of the old chief was unfortunate, but it would not halt them. The four servants could carry the hammock of Chicago Kate while Bull, Slit-ear, and Gyp walked. In the next village they would conduct themselves properly, give little presents to the chief, flatter him, and all would be well. Kate, being told by Daniel that the chief was a young man, offered to put forth all her blandishments.

Gyp the Greek couldn't be restrained from firing a parting shot at the undergrowth as they set out. Gyp hated walking.

Liberia kept up its attack through the hot, clammy morning. Now and then the three gunmen paused and thrust their heads forward in a listening fashion. They were gradually convinced that men from the village they had left were now marching abreast of them, hidden in the green jungle.

"D'ye hear them?" questioned Bull.

"Hell, yes!" cried Gyp.

"Movin' when we move an' stoppin' when we stop!" growled Bull.

"The crimson swines!" shouted Gyp, waving his automatic.

Daniel shook his head. There was no one marching in the surrounding jungle. It was the intense silence that made the whites think so. To prove that the gunmen were wrong, Daniel plunged into the forest. They heard him threshing about in the undergrowth, then he returned to the track to inform them that no person was hidden there.

The gunmen went on. They were suspicious of Daniel. Their straining ears heard the sounds of a marching throng.

In the early afternoon Slit-ear Louis had an adventure. He spotted a baby mon-

key watching him from an overhanging branch, and with wanton cruelty he shot the animal. Before the little one had dropped to the ground the mother attacked the murderer. With amazing speed she slid down a tough liana and from this she leaped upon the topee-covered head of Slit-ear.

The topee was torn to ribbons in a second. Furious fingers ripped at Slit-ear's face; teeth seized the back of his neck. The mother monkey shrieked her indignation. The gunman dropped his weapon and tried to free himself, but the baby monkey was a beloved infant and the mother was beside herself.

Bull Hannen ended the fight by shooting the mother, but the battle upset the nerves of Slit-ear. It was hours before he recovered. His face was a mass of scratches, and the teeth marks of the mother were deep in his neck.

It was after this incident that they saw what Daniel said was a man from the "Devil Bush." The stranger appeared on the road some three hundred yards in advance of the party. He stood and watched them for a few minutes then disappeared in the undergrowth to the right of the trail. A few minutes later he appeared from the left of the track although the Chicagoans had not seen him cross the track!

He did this again and again, hopping into the road on one side and appearing almost immediately from the other. The gunmen told themselves that there were really two men occupied in the performance, but Daniel was strong in the belief that there was only one actor.

"He hop back but no one see him," said Daniel. "Mighty clever debbil man."

"Well, we've had enough of the show," said Gyp the Greek. "Just watch him hop now."

Gyp took a shot at the bounding figure of the "debbil man." The bullet threw up a spurt of dust quite close to the dancing feet of the unknown, who, although not hit, was immensely startled. He dropped on his hands and knees, stared at the spot where the bullet had ricochetted, then fled at full speed down the green alleyway. In a few minutes he was out of sight.

Daniel was saddened by the happening. He shook his head as the three gangsters and the girl showed their amusement. Daniel saw trouble ahead. Lots of trouble. The four boys chattered fearfully amongst themselves. Liberia was weaving the web of fear.

Hours later they met an army of driver-ants on the march. The driver-ant is more to be feared than lions and tigers. When on the march nothing can stop him. Chicago Kate, interested in the main body of the drivers, was attacked by a scouting squad in the rear. Her screams shattered the silence of the late afternoon. Hurriedly she stripped off shoes and stockings. Daniel, helping her to rid herself of the tormentors, told a story of the wife of a missionary that Daniel was escorting into the bush. The lady, sitting down to lunch, perched herself on the nest of the drivers. Suddenly she unloosed a yell, tore frantically at her clothing till she was completely nude before her horrified husband and the bearers, then she took a header into the Cavally River! Driver-ants can break down all the rules of modesty that were ever made.

ALTHOUGH it was but a walk of seven miles between the two villages it was late afternoon when the four sighted the hut cluster in the clearing. The clammy heat made walking an ordeal.

The village was deserted. Not a single soul was in sight.

There were visible indications that the evacuation had been made within a few minutes of the arrival of the Chicagoans. Fires were still burning, here and there a cooking pot containing meal, possibly too hot to carry, had been left on the family hearth. The blasphemy of the three gunmen was terrifying.

There were certain improvements on the previous night. A stream of cold water ran through the village, there were plantains and ground-nuts, while an old rooster who had refused to be evacuated fell a victim to the revolver of Bull. The rooster was hurriedly plucked and roasted. Around a fire the four wrestled with his carcass.

Chicago Kate weakened as the night came down. She thought that Bull Hannen, knowing of several loosely-guarded treasures in different spots round the world might have chosen an easier job.

"Now that tower in Lunnen," said Kate. "I always wanted to go to Lunnen but I never foun' anyone who would take me. An' there's necklaces an' rings there, ain't there, Bull?"

Bull opened his mouth to quell the insubordination of the golden-haired one, but his words were throttled by a Voice. A Voice that came out of the forest. An immense, far-reaching Voice, harsh and terrible. It roared over the deserted village. It swept through the huts, it shook the leaves of the cottonwood trees, it whipped out over the forest and returned with increased vigor.

Daniel shouted an explanation. "De Debbil in de Debbil Bush!" he cried. "He speak. He say, 'Get out quick'!"

"Talkin' to us?" queried Bull.

"Yes," screamed Daniel. "He say big trouble for you to stay along here. Too close to de Bush."

Bull on his feet, gun in hand, swung around in an effort to find out the point from which the Voice came. The task was difficult. Magnified by some native-made appliances constructed on the "bull-roarer" principle, it was hard to find the spot from which it emanated.

"Debbil-bush out back o' village," shouted Daniel.

"How far?" questioned Bull.

"Walk fast get there twenty minutes," said Daniel. "Very bad mans there now."

"How come?"

Daniel walked to the fire around which the terrified boys were standing, picked up an object from the ground and carried it back to Bull Hannen. It was a roughly-made iron claw.

Bull turned it over on his palm, Slit-ear and Gyp staring at it in silence. There was something sinister about the thing. Although the three gunmen were, at the moment, entirely ignorant of the uses to which the thing had been put, they felt that when Daniel explained, its history would be a little blood-curdling.

"Claw o' Leopard Man," gasped Daniel. The great Voice from the jungle had ceased for the moment, so Daniel's deep whisper made the words thrilling. "De Leopard Man fix one claw to each wrist when he go huntin'. He crawl on his belly like de leopard an' snarl an' yowl like de big cats. He no use his fingers; he use de claws."

Again came the Voice. Threatening, menacing, clamorous. The frightened boys milled around each other as if the Voice had a physical effect upon them, stirring them into motion like an invisible spoon.

It died away in loud rumblings and mutterings, then Bull Hannen turned to the spot where the tip of the rising moon showed above the green jungle.

"If we're in the territory of these leopard guys who knows whether de thing we want is not out on show?"

"Who knows?" echoed Slit-ear.

Bull clutched the arm of Daniel and spoke impressively. "These guys dance when the moon is up?"

"Yes, suh," said Daniel.

"An' they haul out this gold totem?"

Daniel nodded.

"Do you think they might be at it to-night?"

Daniel waited before replying, and while he waited the four boys suddenly turned with one accord and stared at a point in the undergrowth. Their necks were outstretched, their lean black bodies were transfixed with the horror gathered in by their distended eyes. They moaned

in chorus. Moaned in the manner of sick monkeys.

Bull and Gyp stepped across and stared at the spot that riveted the attention of the natives. They could see nothing.

There were great poisonous leaves upon which the moonlight flickered, and behind the leaf clusters were deep wells of darkness, but to the two whites there was nothing to explain the abject horror that had fallen on the natives:

Bull was annoyed. "Wot the hell!" he cried, and as he spoke he took the nearest savage by the shoulder and hurled him at the point that held the eyes of the four.

The fellow screamed, fell on his hands and knees, then, picking himself up, he fled down the trail by which they had come. His three companions followed. The whites and Daniel were left alone.

FROM long talks with Daniel-Frustration-of-the-Devil I have reconstructed the happenings of that night. Daniel has great narrative power. With body movements, rolling of the eyes, use of the facial muscles, and a great control of voice he can make any listener with a shred of imagination visualize the scene of which he tells. The African Negro surpasses the Arab as a story teller. Certainly he lacks the finesse of the Arab, but he puts things forward with a tom-tom manner that is very effective.

Daniel, so he asserts, did not wish to lead the gunmen forward to the Devil Bush. He begged them to wait for the morning, and in this desire he was supported by Chicago Kate. Kate was scared. She pleaded with the three, but her words were thrust aside. Bull, Slit-ear Louis, and Gyp the Greek were seized, it appears, with a sort of hysterical courage. They were going to shoot it out with all the Leopard Men, witch doctors, and Devils of Liberia!

I do not think J. Edgar Hoover has ever been in Liberia. Possibly none of his merry men has ever visited the country. Liberia is an out of the way spot. Myself I have been in Monrovia and parts of the hinterland, and I can say truthfully that I have never in years of wandering found a more unlikeable country.

Fear, grisly fear of the fee-faw-fum, raw-head and bloody bones order, has its headquarters in out-back Liberia. The country, in its atmosphere of dank terror, surpasses its neighbors, Sierra Leone, French Guinea, and the Ivory Coast. Curiously this is perceptible to the natives that enter Liberia from the adjoining countries to trade. The Mandingoes of French Guinea who come over the frontier to buy kola nuts return hurriedly to their homes when their buying is done. Other tribes have the same feeling of insecurity when venturing over the Liberian frontier.

I am not holding a brief for gunmen. Like Mr. Hoover I consider them cowardly rats, but I am putting forward information that might lead to a study of that strange hysterical contempt of danger that comes to human rats at odd moments. Someone has called it "slug-courage." Possibly it comes from the possession of death-dealing weapons. I don't know.

"Ah begged 'em to wait till de dawn," says Daniel, "but dey say 'No, we go now! We'se goin' to shoot it out wiv de Leopard Mens'!"

CHICAGO KATE couldn't be left behind. She had to go along. Daniel says she had her own automatic, but terror stopped her from using it.

The moon was high when they set out. The green trees were awash with its light, but the track itself was a pool of ink through which the four men and the girl

stumbled. Here and there monkeys barked, but the silence smothered their yapping. Liberia was waiting. Waiting the attack of three gunmen from Chicago. Gunmen with records.

The forest thinned. The track opened out on a small plain covered with high grass. Somewhere ahead was the dim outline of a mud building. "Debbil Bush," whispered Daniel.

The Liberian commissioners and men of the Liberian Frontier Force, black of course, say that the Leopard Men, seeking human prey, endeavor in every detail to following the attacking methods of the animal whose totem they have adopted. They cover their bare bodies with varicolored nets to give them the correct spotted appearance of the animal they worship, they crawl on their stomachs when stalking their prey, they mimic all the uncouth coughs and snarls of a hungry leopard, and above all, they use the iron claws fastened to their wrists in dealing out death to the unfortunate that crosses their path.

As the gunmen moved across the open that sensation of hidden marchers moving with them came upon them. They halted and spoke together, their automatics ready. They questioned Daniel, but Daniel, for once in his life could not speak. Terror had numbed the muscles of his throat.

But Daniel saw. To the left and right of the little party the grass was coming to life. The high dry grass was moving although the night was windless!

Moving in a manner that suggested the approach of serpents. Human serpents. Moving in upon the three gunmen from Chicago, the terrified girl, and Daniel-Frustration-of-the-Devil.

"Cowardly rats!" says J. Edgar Hoover. Sure. Bull Hannen, Slit-ear Louis, and Gyp the Greek, far from Chicago. Up against it in the hinterland of Liberia.

Scribe of that jungle fight is Daniel. He dropped upon his hands and knees and showed me how the engagement opened. The bare, oiled stern of a creeping Leopard Man made a glistening target as the fellow crept through a spot where the grass was scanty. Gyp the Greek fired.

Now the snarlings, grunts, and frightening coughs of the big cats rose around the five. Exact imitations of the angry noises made by *Felis pardus* when in a murderous mood. The dry grass in violent motion. Five score Leopard Men crawling swiftly toward the party. Clink of the iron claws; massed growls; the horrible purring of cannibals hungry for human flesh.

Daniel by gestures showed me how the three gunmen stood in a triangle. Chicago Kate, eager for flight, had seized the big paw of Daniel and pulled him aside, so Daniel in the few seconds before he took to his heels with the girl, had a view of the gunmen-tripod spitting death into the crawling attackers.

Daniel has one strange memory of the final stage of the fight. Nothing can shake him on the point. He says that when he and Chicago Kate turned, he saw for a fleeting second the gold totem of the Leopard Men. It rose out of the dry grass, a glittering yellow leopard with enormous green eyes from which shot flames. He says that the three gunmen were moving toward it. Fighting desperately to reach it when the wave of murderous natives rolled over them!

Killers of course. Gunmen, kidnapers, crooks. "Cowardly rats." I'm wondering about that word courage. It seems an ill-defined word to me.

Daniel-Frustration-of-the-Devil, holding the hand of Chicago Kate, fled back along the path. Mile after mile they covered, the fear imps biting at their heels. Daniel shouting verses as he ran. Not for a moment did they pause.

LATE on the following day they reached the village where Gyp the Greek had annoyed the chief by playing "hot-foot"

on him. The villagers were kind to them. They dressed the bruised and swollen feet of Kate, gave the two food and drink, and arranged for bearers to carry Kate back to the banks of the St. Paul's River. They asked no questions of the two fugitives. They guessed what had happened to the three gunmen.

In that cablegram that I thought of sending to the G-men I used the words "Chicago Kate reformed." This is how it happened. Staying in Monrovia, while a lackadaisacal inquiry was being made concerning the deaths of Bull, Slit-ear, and Gyp the Greek, Kate made the acquaintance of a banana-planter from Conakry. Her golden hair and roses and cream complexion enchanted the tropic dweller. He proposed marriage, and Kate accepted on the understanding that Daniel should be taken into his service. The planter agreed readily.

On the banana plantation a few miles out of Conakry I spoke with Kate and Daniel. Daniel sang some of his chants for me. One about the wife of Ham interested me. It shows the love of the Liberian Negro for the United States. Although he points continuously to that motto on the great seal reading: "Love of Liberty brought us here," he cannot free himself from the memories of America that have been inherited from the "liberty seekers" who fled our land a hundred years ago.

Daniel's account of Mrs. Ham ran:

"Ole Missus Ham, so de historees say,
Fo' de Mississippi jest pined away,
She longed fo' de b'yous an' de cat-fish pie,
An' she kep' longin' an' longin' till she came to die.
Saint Peter say at de Pearly Gates:
'Where you from, woman?' She say: 'United States'."

Daniel and Chicago Kate, now Madame Pierre Lartigue, often speak about Bull Hannen, Slit-ear Louis, and Gyp the Greek. Daniel and Kate think they were brave men.

That engaging character who seems half-villain, half-hero — Frank Gruber's Szabo—takes the lead in a novelette in our next issue:---

VIGILANTE COLLAR

by FRANK GRUBER

SHORT STORIES
for October 25th
out October 10th

"Speaking of Hats and Padlocks and Mining Claims, You Got Any Ideas About Murder?"

DEATH ON THE AIR

By H. S. M. KEMP

Author of "Two Strings to the Bow," "Twice in the Same Place," etc.

FOR a once-famous Northern traveler, Corporal Joe Taylor was becoming a total loss. Airplanes did that to him. Where Joe had paddled twelve hours a day, packed two hundred of freight over muskeggy portages and tracked up nameless creeks, he now lost no opportunity of doing his patrol-work by plane. Thus, when he was ordered out of Beaverlodge detachment to investigate a sequence of bush-fires that had sprung up in the Otter Mountain country, Joe got in touch with Hank Murphy at once. Hank Murphy flew the air-trails between the Barrens and the city of Frontier; and when Joe laid his proposition before him, Murphy agreed. Said Joe:

"I've got to the stage where I use my head to save my back. Instead of doing the hundred and forty miles to Pemmican Portage by river and having to pole upstream darn near all the way coming home, I'll travel down to the Portage with you in the morning and come back with you when I'm done."

From Pemmican Portage to the Otter Mountains was another hundred and twenty-five miles; and by the time Joe and his Indian canoeman, Charley Big-foot, had investigated their bush-fire epidemic and had reached Pemmican Portage again, Joe's big worry was whether or not Hank Murphy would be there to pick him up. But he need not have worried; Hank Murphy had a contract to deliver forty tons of freight for Sam Sutherland's store at Beaverlodge village, and if he hadn't made contact with Joe that particular day, he would have done so the next.

Feeling like a man who had earned a little relaxation, Joe turned canoe and engine over to the half-breed he had borrowed it from and settled into the co-pilot's chair alongside Hank Murphy.

"I'm getting soft, Hank," he told him. "So almighty soft that when I get home I'm going to stay in bed for a week and rest up. Look at them callouses on my lily-white paws! That's what ten days of Injun travel does to me!"

But when Joe spoke of staying in bed for a week to rest up, he spoke rather rashly, for the next week was going to be rather a busy one for him. But it held one advantage; Joe was going to do a lot of traveling but most of it was going to be done by air.

It began when Hank Murphy kicked the rudder over and began to nose down over Rocky Lake. Rocky Lake was a mere bulge in the Churchill River, a bulge that

was ten miles across and twelve miles long. Down-stream from Beaverlodge village it lay, an hour and a half's run with canoe and motor, ten-minute trip by air. Joe thought engine-trouble was responsible for Hank Murphy's action, but Hank reassured him in his own brusque way.

"Got a jag of stuff for the old bug-hunter. He wrote in some time ago and said he was getting short."

Hank Murphy's bug-hunter was none other than Professor Andrew McKechnie of the chair of entymology at Corinthian University. Corporal Joe Taylor knew him as a man of sixty or thereabouts, near-sighted but with a keen brain. For five weeks the professor had tenanted an old cabin on a knoll overlooking Rocky Lake, collecting data on the bugs of Northern Saskatchewan for the edification of Ontario and the world at large. Joe Taylor had met him several times, and while failing to share the professor's enthusiasm over some new form of insect, he nevertheless had liked him a lot.

So they landed, slid up onto a patch of sandy beach in front of the cabin and waited for the professor to appear. When a plane equipped with a four-hundred-horse Wasp engine lands on one's door-step, there is generally no need to yell. So when after a few minutes the professor failed to put in an appearance, Joe Taylor decided the old man must be away somewhere on a trip.

They got out, walked up to the cabin. The place was locked, secured by a padlock and a heavy chain. Hank Murphy, who was of the Black Irish, heavy-jawed and short-tempered, swore an oath.

"Either I leave the stuff and chance getting paid for it, or I got to stop off here again."

He debated for a moment and then decided to unload. This they did, storing the supplies into an out-house that was open. But when they came to leave, Joe Taylor —who held his job by the ability to use eyes and brains—suddenly noticed that there was no tracks of any kind about the place. No tracks, that is, except what he, Hank Murphy and Charley Big-foot had made themselves. He turned to the Indian.

"What you make of it, Charley?"

Charley was stolid native of forty-five, but long-headed and intelligent. Charley looked around him.

HE remarked first that the canoe was on the beach. He crossed over to it, looked in, and found it held a good inch of rain water. If the professor had experienced the same sort of weather as they had had over in the Otter Mountain country—no rain had fallen at Rocky Lake for three days. And as, puzzled, he looked around him again, three ravens settled a little way from him along the beach.

Here was a fifty-foot wall of rock, that rose almost directly from the water's edge. Without a word, Charley struck off for it. The others followed.

They found the professor. He was lying at the foot of the cliff, on the narrow strip of bouldery shore-line. He was hatless, his head was twisted grotesquely beneath him, and the ravens had already started their gruesome work.

It was a policeman's job, and Hank Murphy let him have it. A brief survey, and Joe Taylor looked up the rocky wall.

"Chasing some new bug," he decided, "and fell over."

Hank Murphy, whose jaw was hard at any time, looked more than ever severe.

"The bugs," he finally observed, "will be chasing him."

"Yeah; but now what?" asked Joe Taylor. "Guess we'll have to take him along."

He went up to the cabin. There was an axe on a chopping-block near the door. Joe picked up the axe, hit the chain a clip, and the chain broke. Inside was a heavy canvas cover. He took this down to where the professor was lying and gave Charley Big-foot a nod.

With the body wrapped, they moved to-

wards the plane. Hank said it would hurt business for Sam Sutherland to find the body mixed up with his groceries; so at his suggestion they lashed it in its cover to the struts of the pontoons.

At Beaverlodge village, while the plane was being unloaded, Joe Taylor indulged in a wash and a shave. The forest-fire patrol had been hard on him; but that was no excuse for him to arrive in civilization looking like a tramp. So he shaved and he bathed and he dressed himself in his red serge and new Stetson; and when he returned to Sam Sutherland's trading-post it was to find Hank Murphy waiting for him. Hank gave one of his sour growls.

This ain't a wedding you're fixing for. It's a funeral!"

Joe grinned, climbed aboard with the hardboiled pilot; and two hours therefrom they landed on the river at Frontier. The body of Professor McKechnie was removed to an undertaking establishment;

and Joe reported to his commanding officer.

INSPECTOR BRISCOMBE was a much harassed man. He chewed on a pen and glowered up at Joe Taylor as the regimentally-correct corporal gave his report.

"If it isn't one thing it's another!" he snarled. "Got a bank-robbery on our hands, a breed killing north of the town, and when everything else fails, we're pestered to death with this Fifth Column stuff. Now you land in here with an accidental death."

Joe nodded in sympathy. "But this case isn't much to worry about—"

"Nothing much to worry about? Maybe it isn't, but it's another straw on the camel's back. Oh well, get onto it. Is an inquest necessary?"

Joe didn't think so. "The professor was near-sighted and none too spry. It's a pity; I liked him. Still, I'll notify Dr. Blake. It's up to him to say whether he wants an inquest or not."

But the inspector was already pawing a sheaf of correspondence. "Sure, sure. Tell Sergeant Ross in the orderly-room to look after it. And his stuff—did you bring that in?"

"Not yet."

"All right. Pack it up as soon as you return. And make out a report before you go."

Joe Taylor moved out into the orderly room and gave the sergeant the O. C.'s message. But Pete Ross refused to play ball.

"*Me* look after it!" he yelped. "What's wrong with *you* looking after it. Eight in the morning till ten at night—while you buzzards in the North sit around all day and play poker!"

"And what d'you do in your spare time?" jeered Joe Taylor. "Try to figure out who cracked the bank, and who beefed the breed? The Old Man spilled me an earful of it; so you needn't start!"

But out of sympathy for the overworked Peter Ross, Joe went ahead. He found Dr. Blake, the coroner, and agreed with him that there was no need for an inquest. A telegram to the East brought word from the professor's sister. She had little funds, but she would like the body shipped home. With all these details taken care of—and with the threat of Pete Ross's that if he stuck around town he'd be found something to do—Joe got in contact with Hank Murphy and arranged to fly north with him early the next day. Murphy was still freighting for Sam Sutherland, and it was little out of his course to swing around by the professor's cabin on Rocky Lake.

"I've got to bale up the old feller's effects," Joe told the pilot. "I don't care whether you leave me there and pick me up later, or if you wait while I do it."

"Might's well wait," grunted Murphy. "Anyway, I can give you a hand."

The cabin the professor had been occupying was originally a trapping shack; but by moss-chinking the walls and flinging more dirt on the roof, the professor had made it habitable. Joe, with more time now to look around him, found that its principal furnishings were a bunk, a table beneath a window, a couple of home-made chairs and a tin stove. But this was not all. A smaller table held a portable typewriter and a radio-set. On a shelf above were several books on entymology and kindred subjects, two of them the work of the professor himself. On other shelves were a microscope, bugs in bottles and butterflies on cards. Pickled in glass jars were larger crawling things that Joe Taylor had met nowhere before but in his dreams. Joe shuddered realistically.

"Looks like the snake-room of a nuthatch. Boy! I'd get the willies living here!"

They baled the professor's blankets and some of his non-breakable possessions in canvas rolls; but when it came to the pickled specimens, his microscope, radio and the like, Joe was stumped. At last he said to Hank Murphy, "Take the bales and fly me up to the detachment. I'll get some boxes there and we'll come down again and pack the rest of the stuff."

But before they went out, both men took another interested look around. And so it was that Hank Murphy came across the professor's diary.

It was of a large size, spaced for six days' entries to a page. It was loose-leafed and had been written up daily on the typewriter. Joe had already poked into stacks of typewritten foolscap, whereon, in scientific jargon, McKechnie had set out the results of his work. The diary, however, was something on the more human side. Here the dead man recounted his travels, the state of his health, weather and temperature conditions. Thus on the twentieth day of June, which was exactly a week earlier, the professor reported falling sick. He complained of dizzy spells

and loss of appetite. On the twenty-first he seemed somewhat better, and he hoped that whatever had attacked him, was beginning to pass. On the twenty-second he was so much improved that he reported paddling

to Fir Point and almost swamping in a head-wind. This, the last entry in the diary, concluded with the statement that his work was almost complete and that he would be glad to see civilization once more.

Joe Taylor shrugged. "His work was completed, all right, but he never knew it." He closed the diary, glanced about him again. "His bugs and his typewriter and his diary. It's a wonder he stuck it as long as he did."

Hank Murphy nodded. "I brought him some stuff in on the eighteenth. He said he figured he'd be through by the first of July and for me to arrange to pick him up then. "That is," explained Hank, "if I was free. If I wasn't free, I was to send him in word by radio."

Joe looked at the receiving-set and noticed that it was similar to his own at the Beaverlodge detachment. He turned the switch to throw on the power, but found nothing happened. The switch-knob was split, so that it turned loosely on the shank of the rheostat.

He tried switching it on again, this time by using the shank alone. It took considerable finger-pressure, but the pilot-lamps gleamed and a moment later music filled the room. Joe decided that he had tuned in CMQ, the five-hundred watt transmitter at Frontier; and when the announcer gave the station's call-letters, he found his guess had been correct.

"The old feller was all ready for you," observed Joe.

"And a week ahead of time," said Murphy. "I wasn't calling him till the thirtieth, and seven o'clock at night."

But as they were getting ready to carry out the bundles, Hank Murphy noticed a piece of mineralized rock on the window-ledge. He picked it up, remarking that the professor must have done a bit of prospecting as well. He offered it to Joe Taylor and asked him what he thought of it.

Joe squinted at the sample. He knew next to nothing about minerals, and said so frankly. "But this," he added, "is fair-looking stuff."

The sample was of rotten, yellowish quartz. It was studded with iron pyrites, held a suggestion of copper and was streaked with bright, yellowish threads.

"Think it's gold?" asked Murphy.

"Might be," agreed Joe, and handed it back.

"I'll get it assayed," decided Murphy. "If it's worthwhile, we'll poke around and see where he got it. Shouldn't be hard. The old coot never traveled far from home."

AT BEAVERLODGE village, Hank Murphy landed once more in front of Sam Sutherland's post. Sutherland had been away for a few days on a trip to civilization, but was now on hand to greet them.

He was a tall and angular man of fifty with a hooked nose and a tight mouth.

"You got back, eh?" Hank Murphy grunted. "Who brought you in?"

"Newt Harmon," said Sutherland. "I caught him in town getting ready for a trip to Cree Lake. He dropped me off here half an hour ago."

While the plane was being unloaded of the professor's effects, Joe Taylor poked around to see if he could find any boxes suitable for packing Professor McKechnie's more breakable belongings. He located three, then sat down outside the store with a couple of loafing Indians. He talked with them for a while, till Murphy and the trader came up.

They went into the store. Joe followed. There, Sutherland and Hank Murphy got into a discussion as to how much of Sutherland's freight still remained in town. To settle the point, Sutherland pulled a suitcase along the counter and said he had brought his invoices in with him.

He opened the suitcase, pawed over clothing and papers and finally found what he wanted. He began to go over the sheets with Hank Murphy, but what he

had to say interested Joe Taylor little. Joe was more interested in something in the suitcase, something half buried under a rolled-up sweater. And that was a sample of rock, twin to the piece he had seen in Professor McKechnie's cabin.

Joe, from where he was standing, studied it carefully. In the weathered rock were the same ironish flakes, the same streaky threads. Joe didn't know that Hank Murphy had also caught a glimpse of the sample until they were in the air and heading for Rocky Lake. Then Murphy, with a whimsical, hard grin, remarked, "Seems like we don't need to worry about the professor's gold mine. Sam Sutherland's just back from town."

Out of his thoughts, Joe nodded. "Yeah. And when *we* get to town, I'm heading for the Mining Recorder's office. I got a hunch."

He said nothing further than that, and when he stepped from the plane he still seemed half abstracted. He studied the shore-line, squinted at the cabin, turned his eyes toward the cliff from where the professor had taken his fatal plunge. Hank Murphy watched him curiously.

"Something worrying you, Corp?"

"Dunno whether it is or not," answered Joe. He cuffed his Stetson to the back of his head, stood spread-legged with his thumbs hooked into his Sam Browne. Scowling at the pilot, he went on. "I was thinking about our friend Sutherland. He generally hits for town along towards fall. This year he went out in June. I wonder what was his hurry."

He walked up to the shack, went inside and stood looking around him. On the wall hung the professor's clothing—a slicker, pants and vest and a battered felt hat. He glowered at the hat for a moment and then spoke to Hank Murphy.

"Now that's sort of queer. Old McKechnie was bald-headed, and recently he suffered with dizzy spells. The dizzy spells sound like a touch of the sun. If that was the case, you wouldn't think that he'd go out, lock the door, and then leave the hat behind."

Murphy nodded slowly. "Unless he generally ran around without one."

"He didn't. You could tell that much by his nice pink-and-shiny dome. No," said Joe stiffly; "the locked door meant that he intended being gone some little time; and if he intended to be gone some little time, why didn't he take his hat along?" Then, suddenly, another thought came to him. He voiced it. "And if he locked the door, what did he do with the key? It wasn't on his person when I searched him in town."

Joe looked about the place, pawed over papers on the table, and finally glanced toward the door itself. Beside the doorframe, hanging on a nail, was a key tied to a sliver of wood.

Joe went out and fitted the key into the padlock. The lock had taken quite a battering from the axe he had wielded earlier, yet it gave easily when Joe turned the key. Said Joe with a tight little grin, "Yeah, it's funny how forgetful the professor was that day. He forgot his hat, and he forgot to pocket the key before he locked the door. In all," he added, "it makes a feller wonder."

Suddenly Joe became more brisk. He picked up the diary, ran through its pages.

"This thing," he remarked, "petered out on a Wednesday. I'd like to know what day it was that Sam Sutherland went to town."

"I can tell you that," said Hank. "It was Wednesday. I picked him up Wednesday afternoon, coming back from a trip to Gold River. Yeah; Tuesday I flew a load into the new workings, and picked up Sutherland on the way home."

Joe nodded slowly. "Sam Sutherland was in town on Wednesday night—and it was Wednesday night that the professor made the last entry in his diary."

After another long pause and another careful study of the cabin, Joe said they had better get the stuff packed. "The

Recording Office in town closes at five; and I want to get there before it does."

THEY packed hastily; and thanks to a tail wind Joe Taylor was in Frontier at a little after four. He and Murphy made straight to the Mining Recorder's office. There they found that one Samuel Sutherland had staked a gold-claim early on the previous Thursday morning. The claim was situated on Loon Creek, two miles west and north of Professor McKechnie's cabin on Rocky Lake.

Joe turned to Hank Murphy. The hard-jawed pilot seemed harder of face than ever.

"Nuff sed," he grunted. "Guess I stick with flying."

Joe thanked the recorder for his trouble and they went out onto the street. Hank Murphy lit a smoke, shied the empty pack into the gutter and looked at Joe Taylor. "Speaking of hats and padlocks and mining claims—you got any ideas?"

"Mebbe I have," admitted Joe. "And that means, Hank, that if you have any more freight for Sam Sutherland that you are flying in soon, reserve a chair for me."

With the professor's effects trucked up to the Barracks, Joe gave an additional report to his O.C. and said he would hit back for Beaverlodge village in the morning. But instead of making the most of a free evening in town, Joe spent it in the company of Dr. Blake, a photographer, and his own nagging thoughts. Up in a room that he took at a hotel, he jotted down certain facts and tried to fit them together, as one might try to fit together the parts of a jigsaw puzzle. There was the diary, a battered felt hat, a padlocked door with the key on the inside. Add to these, the rock sample in the professor's cabin, a similar sample in Sam Sutherland's valise, and a mining claim staked in Sam Sutherland's name—said claim being two miles west and north of the professor's hangout on Rocky Lake.

"And is there anything else?" asked Joe. "Anything else that was wrong?"

All that was wrong in addition to the points that Joe had enumerated was the switch-knob of Professor McKechnie's radio set. That was not only wrong; it was decidedly on the blink, although Joe couldn't see where it fitted into the rest of the picture. But he'd put it there anyway and start again—the diary, the hat, the locked door, the key and the radio-knob. Joe ran over them all, juggled them around; at last hunted up his O. C. again. To him he explained his puzzle, ending up by saying, "But where, if anywhere, the radio-knob fits in, I can't see."

This time, Joe found that two heads were better than one. For where Joe could work out his end of the puzzle, the O. C. guessed at the rest. So much so, that when Joe took off again with Hank Murphy in the morning, his plan of campaign was all mapped out.

Murphy had a split load, half for Sam Sutherland and half for the Hudson's Bay post at Snake River. When Hank Murphy pulled away from Beaverlodge village with instructions to pick up Joe on his return flight to civilization, Joe himself contacted Charley Big-foot. He and the Indian traveled by canoe to the professor's cabin again, and there, Joe explained to his companion what was required.

"I'm looking for a brown leather windbreaker with black shoulders and sleeves. Scout around and see if you can find one." The Indian gave a half grin, but Joe persisted. "I'm not fooling. You know what a windbreaker is? Well, this is made up of two colors. The coat itself is brown, but the shoulders and the sleeves are black. I don't know where you'll find it, if you find it at all. But let's see what you can do."

Knowing that Joe was in earnest, Charley dug into the search whole-heartedly. Like a slow-moving bloodhound, he poked around the shack, behind it, out into the nearby bush. Joe himself found a trolling-

spoon and a length of line; and using the professor's canoe, he undertook to drag the river-bottom. But he had no more success than did the Indian; and after an hour, both men were ready to quit.

Then Joe had a bright idea. "One way to get rid of a thing," he told the Indian, "is to burn it. But a man would have quite a job burning a windbreaker in that bit of a cook-stove."

The Indian brightened. Come to think of it, he had seen a place where someone had apparently been burning rubbish recently. Perhaps Joe would care to inspect the place?

Joe would; and he did. Not ten yards north of the cabin, this someone had built a fire during—or prior to—the last rainy spell. Joe rustled around in the sodden ashes, and if he failed to find a leather windbreaker, he found the next best thing. Which was a charred fragment of leather and three half-burned buttons.

He fished out his find, studied the articles carefully and wrapped them in his handkerchief. He told the Indian the search was at an end, and that the sooner they got back to Beaverlodge village the better it would be.

ARRIVING there, Joe's next move was merely a following of Inspector Briscombe's orders. Himself, he would have been leery of doing it; but if the O. C. wanted to go out on a limb, Joe couldn't stop him. Anyway, he mused, the end would probably justify the means.

So he walked into Sam Sutherland's store, found the trader working at his books and gave him a honeyed smile.

"Grab your coat and toothbrush, Sam," he ordered. "You're taking a trip to Frontier."

Sutherland scowled his surprise, and his thin, hard mouth tightened. Then he asked, "And what takes me to Frontier?"

"Hank Murphy's plane, on his next trip south today. The Old Man wants to talk to you."

Sutherland put on his best poker-expression. "You mean I'm under arrest?"

"Not right now," said Joe. "We just want to talk things over. But if you want to act tough about it," and Joe shrugged carelessly, "that's up to you."

Joe suddenly detected a weakening in Sutherland's face. Sutherland didn't know just how much Joe knew, and it made him uneasy. So he tried a bluff

"You can't make me go anywhere," he stated. "Not without a reason for it."

Joe could be hard-boiled when occasion warranted. He chose to be hard-boiled now.

"Reason?" he sneered. "I got plenty of 'em. D'you want me," he barked at the man, "to trot 'em out?"

Sutherland decided to capitulate. "No," he said shortly. "I'll go along."

Hank Murphy's eyebrows lifted as Joe walked down to the plane shepherding Sam Sutherland. Joe nodded grimly. "Another passenger, Hank. I forgot to mention it coming up. Got room for him?"

Murphy figured he had, but he said nothing further till they landed at Frontier. Then, as Sutherland was stepping from the plane, he whispered in Joe's ear, "What's this? An arrest?"

"Next thing to it," said Joe. "Come along and see the show."

They walked up to the Barracks, and as though being expected, were ushered immediately into Inspector Briscombe's room. The O. C. nodded to Hank Murphy and Joe, then ordered Sam Sutherland to take a seat.

Up at Beaverlodge, Sam Sutherland had looked like a pretty fair poker-player; here, he was just another mug. He eased into the chair the inspector had indicated, held his hat in his hand and stared anxiously at Inspector Briscombe. The inspector gave him a fish-eyed stare in return.

"You staked a gold claim a few days ago," he began.

Sam Sutherland might have been ex-

pecting this. He nodded. "Yeah; I guess I did."

"Stuff of this sort?" The O. C. rolled a rock-fragment onto the desk.

Sutherland frowned. "Well, stuff pretty much like it."

"Just what," asked the officer, "was the deal you made with Professor McKechnie? I mean, about this claim?"

Sutherland stiffened perceptibly. He blinked, stared at the officer. Briscombe pressed his advantage.

"Come on; out with it! McKechnie found this stuff, didn't he? You got it off him on the pretext of having it assayed. But instead of having it assayed, you staked it outright and left him holding the bag."

It was apparent that the inspector knew altogether too much for Sam Sutherland's liking. Sutherland wetted his lips, looked awkwardly around him. "I told him—" he began.

"Oh, I know what you told him. But

what matters more is what I'm telling *you!*" Inspector Briscombe put on his best bull-dozing manner. "We've reason to believe that Professor McKechnie was murdered. I don't suppose you killed him to get this claim for yourself?"

Sam Sutherland seemed to freeze. But only for a moment. "Me kill him!" he croaked. "I—I wouldn't kill nobody!"

The inspector seemed amused. "In fact, to prove your point, you'd be quite willing to record this claim all over again—half of it in the name of the professor?"

Sutherland nodded emphatically. "Sure, I would! But that ain't sayin' I killed him! And how d'you know he was killed?"

Joe drew from his tunic Professor McKechnie's diary. He laid it on the O. C.'s desk so that Sam Sutherland, by craning his turkey-neck, might see it."

"This diary," explained Joe, "is loose-leafed, and the professor entered her up each night on his typewriter. But the funny thing about it is the fact that the old feller entered it up for the day after he died."

Sutherland frowned. "After he died?"

"Yeah!" Joe turned back a leaf and pointed to several earlier entries in the book. "See this? Shoving a leaf into the typewriter each night meant that the professor wouldn't get his margins quite in line. Here," he said, pulling out a six-by-ten photograph, "is an enlargement of that particular page. You can see what I mean. This line begins a little bit in; the next day a little bit out. But on this one," and he produced an enlargement of the last page, "you can see that each day's margin is plumb in line with the entry of the day before."

Sam Sutherland shook his head stubbornly. "I don't get you."

"You don't, eh?" Joe grunted. "Well, lemme tell you something else. The professor was murdered before he had a chance to enter up his diary for the twenty-first of June; but the twentieth, the twenty-first and the twenty-second were entered up by somebody—and they were all entered up at the one time." Joe paused, then went on. "This hooey about the professor feeling sick, having dizzy spells, well, that was just so much business put in by the man who typed it to give us

a reason for the old chap falling over the cliff and breaking his neck. And if you want more proof why the professor didn't do those last three days typing, here it is." Joe turned back a few pages. "Look—the eleventh, the thirteenth, the nineteenth; all dates with a 'one' in them. As there's no figure 'one' on a typewriter, the professor did as most people do—he used the small letter 'l.' But when this other duck started to forge the entries, he didn't notice it. His habit was to use the capital 'I' for a 'one'; so he wrote the 'twenty-first' like this—'2Ist.' And that's the only time it was written that way in the whole of the book."

As Joe finished speaking, the roar of an incoming plane rattled the windows. It died away as the pilot swung to the river for a landing. And just then, too, a knock came on the door and a man entered. He was about twenty-five, suave and handsome. Inspector Briscombe nodded him to a seat, and once more Joe Taylor went ahead.

"There's no need for me to tell you, Sam, all the proof we rolled up that the professor had been murdered in the cabin and his dead body flung over the cliff; but if you want an explanation of how the radio-knob was split, you'll have to ask Hank for that."

Hank Murphy frowned, looked queerly at Joe.

"The radio-knob?" he repeated. "What would I know about that?"

JOE looked at the handsome man sitting beside Inspector Briscombe. He gave him a smile. "You're a newcomer to this town, Mr. Shepherd, but you're already quite a favorite. I think Professor McKechnie was listening to you at the very moment he died. Would you mind reading the special announcement you put over CMQ at seven-thirty of the evening of June twenty-first?"

In his work as station announcer for CMQ, Bob Shepherd had previously given no sign of nervousness. But now there was a distinct tremble in his voice as he began to read from a scrap of paper he held in his hand.

> "I have here an announcement from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Just at closing hours today, the Royal Bank was held up by a lone gunman who lifted fifteen thousand dollars in currency, shot the bank teller and made his escape by locking the rest of the staff in the vault. He is a man of about five feet six, thin-featured and gray-eyed. His face was partly covered with a black silk handkerchief, and he was wearing a dark sweater, open-necked shirt, tweed cap and gray pants. From information since gathered, he is identified as a man who was seen in the bank an hour earlier in the afternoon. At that time he was dressed similarly, except that instead of a sweater and cap, he was wearing a brown leather windbreaker with black sleeves and shoulders and a gray fedora. Anyone seeing such a person either in the city or on the highways is asked to communicate at once with the Mounted Police."

Announcer Shepherd finished his reading, looked up, and was folding the paper again when Hank Murphy came to life. With a tremendous swing, Murphy wheeled to the door, tore it open and crashed through. But what Hank Murphy didn't know was that three stalwart Mounted Policemen were waiting just outside the door for this very thing to happen. They tripped him, flung themselves on him, and had him pinned by handcuffs before he had recovered his first breath. They hauled him back into the office at about the same time as a fourth policeman led another handcuffed man in from the street.

With panting Hank Murphy at one end of the inspector's desk, Joe Taylor looked with some interest at the man who had just arrived. He was shortish, rat-featured, and was wearing a coat of a pattern sus-

piciously like a pair of pants and a vest Joe had seen hanging on the wall of Professor McKechnie's cabin. Meanwhile, the inspector was speaking to this man's escort.

"So you got him, eh, Marchwell?"

The escort, a lanky lance-jack, nodded grimly. "And without much trouble, sir. I merely asked at Gold River who was Murphy's passenger on his last trip in. They told me a man named Bud Rane. Rane," said the lance-jack, indicating the prisoner, "had bought a tent and was living just outside the camp. I found him there, as well as the currency. It was under his blankets, buried in the ground."

The O. C. turned to the rat-faced prisoner. "Well; what have you to say?"

"I ain't talkin', see!" snarled the man. "I gotta get a lawyer."

The O. C.'s lip curled. "Wise guy, eh? But a guy who wasn't wise enough."

"There's no need for him to talk," put in Joe Taylor. "I can put it together without him. After he knocked over the bank that day, he slipped out and down to Hank Murphy's ramp. He and Hank took off," continued Joe, "and in the plane, Rane got back into his windbreaker and hat. They landed at the professor's and were forced to stay there on account of dirty weather. After supper, the professor turned on the radio; and when Shepherd handed out his announcement regarding a thin-faced man of five feet six dressed in a brown and black windbreaker and a gray fedora, the game was up. One of the pair grabbed the radio-switch and accidentally broke it, while the other tackled the old man. They had to beef him to save themselves. The bank teller had died."

Hank Murphy broke in. "I didn't beef the old bug-hunter!" he snarled. "It was this rat here—this guy Rane."

The rat, Rane, snarled back at him, but the C. O. silenced them both. He spoke to Hank Murphy. "But you typed the diary. That trick of yours of using a capital 'I' for a 'one' showed up just as well in the diary as it did on a bunch of accounts you rendered us a little while ago for flying expenses. But your worst mistake was to emphasize the twenty-first. Corporal Taylor didn't pay much attention to that because it held no significance for him. But it did for me. On the twenty-first we ran into that puzzling hold-up of the bank."

The most interested spectator was Sam Sutherland. Glued to his chair and staring at the two manacled prisoners, he now turned to Inspector Briscombe.

"Then you don't need me any more?"

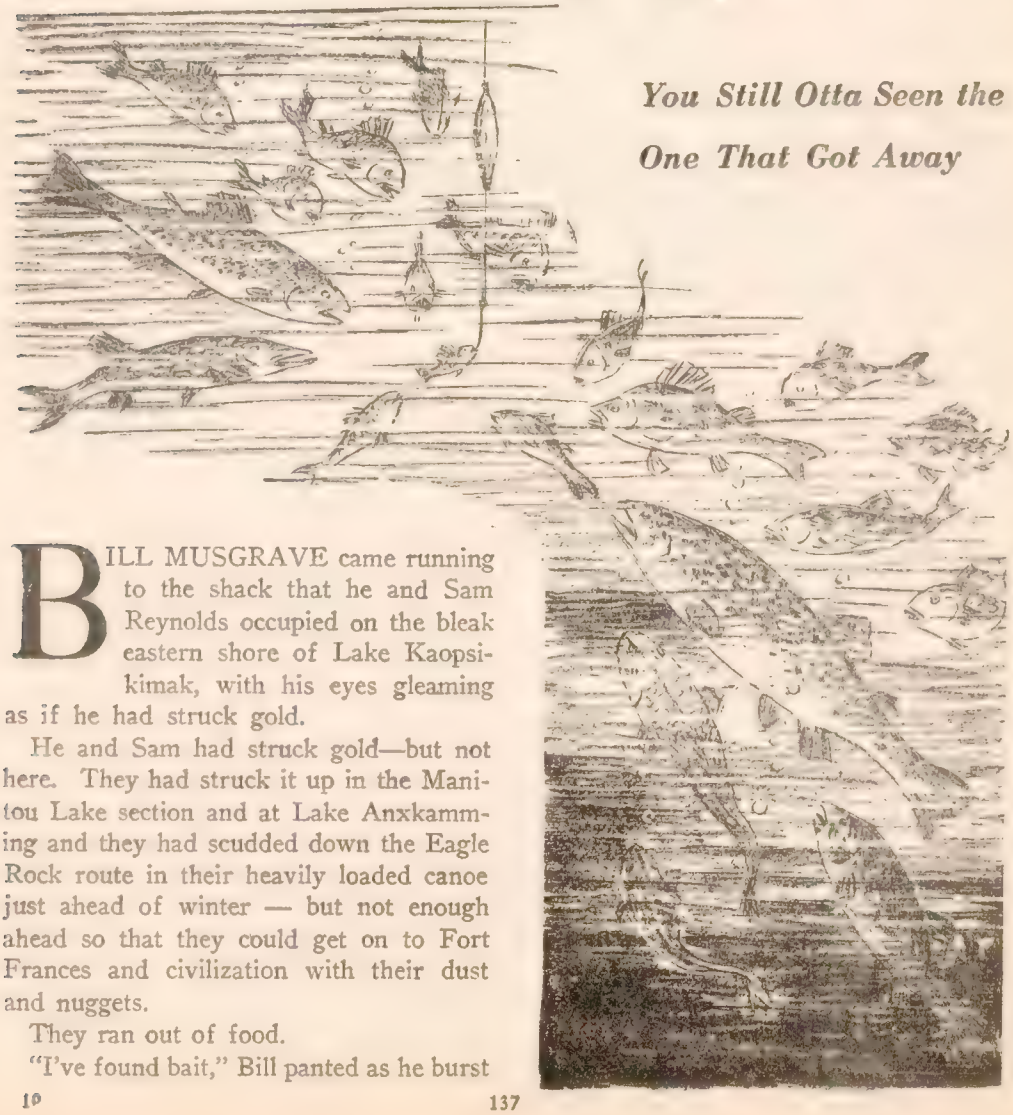
The inspector glanced across at Joe Taylor. "This man," he said, indicating Sutherland, "mentioned something about re-entering his claim. The professor had an elderly sister. She might be interested in a half share in a gold claim; might even need the money." When Joe grinned, he went on. "You've just ten minutes before the recorder's office shuts, so—take Mister Sutherland down there, before he changes his mind."

A Tale Of The Tipes

By

CLAY PERRY

You Still Otta Seen the One That Got Away



BILL MUSGRAVE came running to the shack that he and Sam Reynolds occupied on the bleak eastern shore of Lake Kaopsikimak, with his eyes gleaming as if he had struck gold.

He and Sam had struck gold—but not here. They had struck it up in the Manitou Lake section and at Lake Anxkamming and they had scudded down the Eagle Rock route in their heavily loaded canoe just ahead of winter — but not enough ahead so that they could get on to Fort Frances and civilization with their dust and nuggets.

They ran out of food.

"I've found bait," Bill panted as he burst

in the door. "I've found whitefish fingerlings in the pool below Rocky Falls. They were like silver, when you looked at them lyin' on the bottom. Where there's whitefish there's lake trout and muskies or bass and wall-eyes."

"Yeah? And I heard wolves howlin' last night in the north," growled Sam. "And where there's wolves there's moose and deer but we can't find 'em. This is a hell of a country! You said there was lakes alive with fish and the woods full of fresh meat on the hoof and we could live off the land. Well, mebbe you meant by that we'd eat dirt. If there was any food fish in this lake I'd eat my shirt."

"Get ready to chew flannel, then," exulted Bill. "Which reminds me, I want to cut a leetle strip off'n the tail of your red undershirt for flags. Tonight it'll freeze so I can go ice-fishin' tomorrow."

"Leave my shirt-tail alone!" snapped Sam. "Tomorrow I'll go out and shoot a porkypine. You can play polar bear if you want to with your own shirt-tail. Mebbe you'll get a jackfish or two that taste like glue with pins in it. I suppose you think them fish is just waitin' for the ice to freeze before they'll bite. Anyhow, they been waitin' plenty."

"Funny thing, Sam, but that's just what they are doin'," declared Bill, thereby proving beyond all doubt that he was a dyed-in-the-wool fisherman — which Sam was not.

A FISHERMAN of the first water believes in curious things, such as the direction from which the wind blows, the state of the moon, and above all that "where there is little ones there's big ones"; in other words, he is superstitious. But a fisherman also has patience.

Bill Musgrave spent the afternoon patiently fashioning a clumsy net of unraveled rope strands which he sewed onto a spruce hoop and weighted with odd bits of metal.

Just at dusk he sank the net in the pool below the falls, sprinkling a few precious crumbs in the water and when he pulled the net up it gleamed with living silver.

Sam was for eating the whitefish. Bill swore he'd die first.

"That's what you will do because all that'll happen to 'em as bait is you'll exercise 'em on the end of a line till they drown," grumbled Sam angrily.

"An' you'd kill the goose that laid the gold egg, you would," Bill declared, "and eat 'em. But you won't eat my bait."

Bill Musgrave was a little Englishman and Sam Reynolds was a big American who had prospected together all spring, summer and fall. Now they were caught between open water and the belated freeze-up with nothing left to eat save a few beans, a strip of salt pork and a handful of flour. They were almost one hundred miles from any source of supply. It was impossible to trail out overland, for the muskegs which lay among the savage rock ridges would have swallowed them down. They must wait for ice thick enough to bear their weight with their heavy packs. To start in a canoe, now, meant to be caught far from decent shelter in a blizzard and probably swamped. They were rich with gold, but that was not fit to eat; and they were half starved already and headed for a bad quarrel unless they got some food, soon. Each man thought that his own brand of snarling sarcasm was brilliant wit and the other fellow's was nonsense.

"What's them gadgets you're whittlin' on?" demanded Sam that evening, as he watched Bill fashioning some springy, tricky objects out of spruce and bits of hay-wire.

He had been sitting with his back to Bill, huddled over the stove in his shirt-sleeves, his red flannel undershirt sticking out over his belt, behind.

"This here," said Bill with pride as he attached a bit of red cloth to the swaying end of a thin strip stapled loosely to a larger one, "this here is a tipe."

"A tipe? You mean a tip-up," Sam corrected.

"No, I mean a tipe. A tip-up is a bird, what's named a rail. This here is a tipe which is an apparatus for catchin' fish through the ice."

"A tipe, my eye! Say," Sam reached his hand around behind him and felt the shortened shirt-tail, "say, I'll be ripe for murder if you clip off any more of my underwear to make flags for them tip-ups."

"I only took an inch off of it," grinned Bill, "just enough to flag the tipe."

"A tip-up was a tip-up when I went to school," declared Sam.

"Then you never went to a school of fish," retorted Bill. "You want to go back and study English."

"I'll flip a dollar with you to see who eats the whitefish tomorrow," suggested Sam stubbornly. "That'll be a *flipe*, I suppose, to you."

"It'd be a crime in any language," snapped Bill.

While they wrangled, far, far into the night, the Red Gods of the North flipped a cloud or two and Kaopsikimak was frozen over in the morning. Partly over. The channel which ran close to the cliff-bordered eastern shore remained open water. Fifty yards away gleamed a sheet of ice, perhaps an inch thick, not yet sufficient to bear a man's weight in safety. Bill couldn't go fishing yet. He walked up and down the shore like a caged bear, cursing because he couldn't get over onto the ice with his bait and his tipe or tipes. He begged Sam to help him try for it in the canoe, but Sam offered to shoot him, mercifully, instead and went hunting.

He returned late, empty-handed, hollow-eyed and hungry, and found Bill making more tipe or tip-ups.

"You might as well build a fire with them things," he growled. "Tomorrow we'll have whitefish for breakfast—if we have breakfast."

"We'll 'ave beans for breakfast and lake trout for supper," Bill corrected. "Pass yourself the beans for supper tonight and lay off the minners."

"You're just the type would call tip-ups tipe and starve a man to death savin' whitefish for bait and denudin' a man of his shirt-tail. I got my rear end half froze today, huntin', account of your thievin' of flannel."

"If I'd dreamed you would come back without a moose or a deer or a wolf or even a porkypine I'd a baked the bait," taunted Bill. "We got to get game or fish or we won't even be able to crawl outa here on the ice when it gets thick enough for us to hit trail."

"It's my turn to get breakfast tomorrer," said Sam ominously. "I'll use what grub I can find," and he glanced significantly at the big bucket in which Bill was keeping the bait. Already several of the slim silvery minnows had turned bellies up. "Look a' that! Lettin' good food die on us! Lettin' it go to waste.

"It ain't wasted. I can use dead live bait if they start hittin' live ones," declared Bill, fishermanwise. "You leave them dead live bait alone!"

His own mouth watered at the thought of the tender morsels, fried in salt pork grease, but he held stubbornly to his purpose, which was to make a real catch through the ice. The fish in Kaopsikimak and in the river that entered it had refused all lures trolled through the water from the canoe, but Bill knew from old experience that usually a dangling live bait let down through the first ice will decoy bottom-feeding fish of any kind, especially lake trout.

"I'm goin' to take the canoe in the mornin'," Sam announced suddenly, "and while they's still open water, paddle down the channel to that blind bay and see if I can't su'prize that bunch of squabbles we saw hangin' there a week ago."

"They be froze in if they stayed there over this night," declared Bill. "And you can 'ave your bloomin' fish-ducks. Anyhow, *I'm* goin' to take the canoe to cross

the channel to the ice, that'll be thick enough tomorrow."

"You ain't goin' to risk your life and the canoe, tryin' to land on that thin ice," Bill argued—and so, far, far into another night.

THAT night deeper degrees of frost fell and the jack-pine cabin walls crackled ominously, but to Bill the sound was heartening; it meant the ice would thicken well. He was up almost every hour, after midnight, stoking the stove, stirring the water in the bait-bucket to give added oxygen to the whitefish, fussing with his socks and shoe-pacs. Sam awoke with him, watchful and suspicious until the last time Bill was up. When he finally started up, in daylight, Bill was gone. So was the bucket of bait and the half dozen tipe Bill had made, but in a tin plate at Sam's place at the table lay one solitary, bloated dead whitefish.

Sam didn't take it as a joke at all. It hurt like a stab in his stomach that was a bottomless empty pit, and it hurt like sin when he rushed out and discovered that the canoe was gone, too.

After a few minutes he saw it, lying on its side on the ice, dangerously close to the open water of the channel, and beyond it, on the smooth, glistening surface a solitary dark spot that moved about like a steel filing on an electrified sheet of paper. It was Bill.

"How did the damn fool git over there, anyhow?" and Sam cursed, with a modicum of grudging admiration for his partner's raw courage.

"If she blows much she'll break the ice where he left the canoe," he predicted sourly as little gusts of a fresh northwest dawn wind broke the channel water into choppy waves. "It'll blow that canoe into the water, too."

It was really Bill that Sam was worried over, Bill out there alone on two inches of ice or less. To relieve his feelings Sam went back into the cabin and flung the dead whitefish on the floor and stamped on it—and then had a mess to clean up. He cooked up all but a handful of flour into bannock bread and made a set of bean and salt pork sandwiches before he started off hunting, afoot.

"That'll fetch him up short if he comes in when I'm gone, the crazy Cockney," he snarled as he took just one of the four sandwiches for himself.

He set off down the lake toward the swamps where he hoped to find game, meaning to swing back to the bay to try to surprise some of the hardy squabbles or fish-ducks which lingered in the last open water before flying south. They were as bad as loons, but they could be eaten if he got any.

Meanwhile Bill Musgrave skewered wriggling bait on hooks and let them down one hundred feet and more into the depths of the lake where *Cristimover Namaycush*, the lake trout, might be lurking. Bill had cut six round holes with his chisel, each about two feet in diameter, spacing them twenty feet apart, in a circle. Every time he struck a blow with his heavy ice-chisel little cracks ran in all directions and made his toes curl up as he realized that there was but two inches of ice between him and one hundred feet of cold water. He walked gingerly, shuffling along in his rubber-soled shoe-pacs on the slippery steel-gray sheet that spanned the lake from the west shore to the edge of the channel where the current had prevented freezing. When he set his tipe, thrusting the ends of the sticks through tiny holes cut beside each large one, facing them against the wind, he found it necessary to prop them with broken bits of ice skimmed from the holes to keep them erect. The two ounces of lead on each line put considerable strain on the tipe. He bent his wire triggers deep to prevent the sinkers tripping the line by sheer weight.

All set and baited, there was nothing for Bill to do but watch and wait. He raised his eyes and studied the weather. All was

calm and fairly clear save for the usual morning wind from the west. Bill wished it would turn colder and snow to give him some more ice and something to walk on atop it. The Red Gods grinned at his wish.

It occurred to Bill, after an hour of waiting with no action, that it would be a good time to walk to the west shore and collect fuel for a fire. It was getting cold, all right, but he considered the ice too thin to build a fire on—he would have to have a flat rock of some size to hold it. The shore was a mile away, and he might have a bite while he was gone and lose hook, line and sinker.

"I can go ashore after, an' cook up a lunch," he told himself.

He had taken nothing to eat with him save a bit of a pork rind to chew on. He rolled a cigarette from curly-cut and sat down on the ice. He skimmed the surface of the holes, freshened the water in the bait-bucket, tested the triggers of each set-up with his forefinger, and when he tripped one by accident and a piece of Sam's shirt-tail flew its red signal his heart jumped into his throat.

He was trying the last of the six tipe when a rattle at the other side of the circle, behind him, sent him scudding and slipping across to where the flag wabbled back and forth, the trigger free. The ice was so smooth that he slid past the hole and had to crawl back on his hands and knees. The loop from the trigger had disappeared under water, but a glance in the clear fluid told Bill that very little line had run out from the neat coil of two hundred feet he had left.

BILL restrained himself with difficulty from jerking on the line. He knew better, for he knew that the laker nibbles and nips, nibbles and nips, as if testing the bait, when it noses about a still-fishing rig. It might have the bait in its mouth and lying there, waiting to see what would happen before swallowing. Or it might have the bait and be gone! Bill's fingers itched to test the line and see. There was food at the end of it—perhaps. One hundred feet down, at the end of that much slender silk, tested to forty-two pounds—when it was new, and it had been used a lot, in trolling, for months. And he must haul it up, hand over hand, steadily, not too swiftly, not jerkily, without giving an inch of slack. And when the fish came near that hole, fighting, plunging head down, a fifteen pounder maybe, he must steer him through without letting his head strike the edge and tear the hook loose.

But he must wait for the line to move and run out.

He got hold of it with thumb and forefinger, delicately, leaving two loops for slack, and suddenly it jumped. He gulped and grabbed—but the line stopped running. Bill's heart seemed to be revolving in his chest. He was sure, now, that he had a laker on. He must not lose him.

Before Bill had left the cabin he had taken careful stock of their pitiful store of food. It had been about enough to keep one man alive to Fort Frances, five days journey at best, with a heavy load of dust and ore. If it didn't snow he must slip and slide on the ice for weary miles, and even with snow it would be hard, for their Indian webs were poor. At rapids they

would have to detour as if canoeing, for there would be no ice to walk on.

In his mind's eye he saw Sam trudging out with his load, poking ahead of him with a stick that had a sharp nail in it, to test doubtful places, a blizzard coming up, Sam blinded by it, weaving on his feet from weakness. Bill did not even think of himself as being the one to go; he would be the one to huddle up in the cabin and wait for rescue—or for death. Sam was the better man on trail; Sam was the hunter. Bill was a fisherman.

He crouched on one knee, his hands holding the line as if it were hot wire, and gambled for food. Before him was a picture of a beautiful pink-bellied *Cristy*, with firm, pinkish flesh, falling apart in the frying-pan—or lying on the ice beside him, flopping vigorously while he gloated.

Zip! The line leaped into the water, yards in a second. Bill's stiffened hands almost failed to close and when they did a leaping coil wrapped about his wrist and drew his right hand into the water with a jerk, but he gave a loud cry of delight as he felt the weight of the live thing he had hold of. He had to pull hard to get his hand out of the water and stand up, and he was afraid he might have been too hasty, that the hook might be only caught in the lips, not firmly imbedded in the thick tongue or down the throat. He kept on hauling up, though, hand over hand, steadily. He had one hundred and fifty feet of line to bring in, or more now. The slim silk cut his hands and he had to wrap it about his fingers with each drag to hold it at all. The fish fought with those sharp, strong bottom-seeking dives typical of the laker and Bill had to labor for every yard he gained. His feet slipped and he went to his knees and almost dived into the hole but he cursed with joy. Whoop! Would that fellow hold? Would the line break; would it never end? It cut against the edge of the ice and Bill's heart dropped into his shoe-pacs. He changed position to avoid tangling the line and the tipe together and hauled in faster, for the fish circled as he came near the top.

Bill caught a gleam of silver, fifteen feet down. Wowie! It was a beauty. He breathed like a runner ending a mile, from excitement rather than exhaustion. Every nerve, every muscle, every thought was intent on the landing of that fish. Steady does it! Damn that line!

It slipped in his wet, half-frozen fingers which were cramping, but he took a stronger hold, regardless of the crack in his right forefinger-joint, and the blood that was coming. He felt no pain, only fierce palpitations of delight and hope and apprehension.

THE trout made a powerful circling lunge. Bill tried to check him but slipped again and as he pulled up the line it caught on a button of his mackinaw for an instant and as he fumbled it off, the nose of the big trout banged against the ice—and Bill went over backward with his hook and lead flying in air, empty.

The fish had got off just under the hole.

"But there he is!" Bill yelped aloud as he rolled over and got up.

There he was, a magnificent laker, lying flat on his side, four feet from the hole, one round eye looking owlishly up at Bill. Motionless, save for a slight stirring of his broad tail. Bill stared at him, not daring to move. He was all of three feet long, that *Cristy*—and fat. But Bill couldn't touch him.

He was under the ice.

The trout, evidently, had been stunned by the impact of his nose against the ice, and by the sudden change in pressure from one hundred feet under water to the surface. Often a fish brought up swiftly from such depths will be made helpless, its air-bladder bursting from its throat. This one looked to be helpless, indeed, and he was within inches of Bill's left foot, but he could not be reached, unless—

Bill looked wildly about for his iron

chisel, one he had made from a crow-bar used in mining. It lay flat on the ice, clear across the circle, near where he had dug his last hole. With that weighty chisel, one smart blow and he would have that laker, impaled by the thrust or stunned too much to come to. Until Bill could cut a hole around him and get him.

But the chisel was too far away to chance a rush for it.

Bill fairly hurled himself up and came down with both heels striking the ice directly above the trout's head.

The trout moved, slightly. Bill fell and the ice cracked, a white spot appearing where his heels had struck. He raised one foot and slammed the heel down again, as he sat, and it hurt like sixty. The fish wiggled his tail, turned over, righted himself, turned head down and swam, slowly, beneath Bill's anguished gaze, down, down, out of sight. And Bill lay flat on his belly and watched through the crystal-clear ice that had foiled him from fish—from food.

Bill did not swear. He used the worst curse he could think of.

"You son-of-a-Crook!" he said, taking in vain the name of a well-hated logging-boss foreman for whom Bill once had worked.

He could not seem to get up. He lay, peering down into the greenish-black depths whence the beauty had vanished with a farewell wave of his great tail—after being revived by the blow by which Bill had hoped to stun him. Bill's chisel, twenty feet away; two inches of ice between him and—maybe life or death.

Bill's hands shook as he untangled the line with wet, wind-nipped fingers. He was sick at the stomach, and this was not strange, for besides disappointment, he had drunk too much ice-water, smoked too many curly-cuts on an empty stomach.

He had taken two hours, the best fishing hours of the day, according to his angling traditions, to get out onto the ice-field with the canoe. He had managed it by charging swiftly from the channel, sitting far back in the stout craft, its bow elevated so that it slid onto the edge of the ice, breaking some, but when Bill lunged forward, sliding up and onto it, safely, and then he had propelled himself farther on with the ice-chisel. It had been cleverly

done—but now he had lost his first fish and a big one.

Maybe his last fish, too. Miracles did not happen in pairs.

BILL tightened his belt, flogged his shoulders with his numb hands and set his jaw, grimly. He had proved to himself that there were fish to be caught, anyway. He baited the unlucky hook, spat on it as a prayer, let it down and went and got his chisel, just in case something might happen again—in a thousand years or so. However, keeping his chisel with him meant something, later on.

For four hours Bill tended his tipe and nothing happened. He jiggled the bait to make it "work." He pulled up the long lines to inspect the bait, he rebaited. Four o'clock and no bites, not a nibble. One tipe had tipped but it was a false alarm, a "wind-bite." Bill was past feeling hungry. He took his oath he would stay out here until he landed a fish, even if only a bony, soggy jackfish. The sky darkened in the west, angry black clouds scudded low above the rock ridges. The tipe tipped, constantly, from the rising

gale and kept Bill chasing, with his heart in his mouth. The trees along the west shore bent as the wind swooped over and through them and down onto the broad lake. The first sweep of it flung Bill's unbuttoned mackinaw wide open. The force of it flung him back, sliding, a dozen feet. It bore the bitter breath of the North in its teeth.

"Well, she's sure goin' to freeze some more," Bill comforted himself. "Mebbe snow some, too."

The water in his bait pail froze. He broke the ice and skimmed it and put in fresh water; he scowled at the dozen whitefish which had turned up, dead. He had but five live ones left save those on the hooks. He cut a hole in the center of his circle of tipe and strung all the "dead live bait" on a spare line and let it down as a decoy, to fetch the lakers around; a trick he had learned from the Indians on the Crow reservation up north.

"Gettin' time for the afternoon run," Bill soliloquized confidently. "They orter hit now."

The dusk thickened, the wind thundered through the ragged jack-pines and tamaracks and Norways and beat down on the lake like a flail. Black clouds seemed to roll right along the ridges, the wind got colder, too. Bill turned up the collar of his gray shirt, buttoned his mackinaw, drew down the earlaps of his monkey-cap. The ice crackled, then it boomed like many guns.

"Ah! Sure is freezin' fast!" exulted Bill who was also freezing.

He heard a different crackle and looked over at the canoe. He had dragged it a distance he believed sufficient from the open water, and it had been wet when he left it; it must have frozen fast. All the same, the increasing velocity of the wind made him anxious, and that crackle had sounded like—he started for the canoe, only to whirl and scamper back as a flag flew up.

Only another wind bite. But as he knelt to fix the loop on, a ripping, grating sound brought him about, and he saw the canoe whirling like a clock-hand gone crazy, then skittering away toward the channel. Even as he ran toward it, it slid in, ducked and bobbed and moved merrily away toward the southeast, edging away from the ice toward shore.

"Marooned, by Crook!" Bill groaned—then he grinned, for he remembered he was not on an island, after all. He was connected with the western shore by ice, ice that was thickening fast, if the booming barrage was any indication.

But he was cut off from camp until the channel should freeze over and be strong enough to bear him, unless Sam saw the canoe and salvaged it, or unless he walked six or seven miles up the lake and river and found a place to wade the stream.

Bill went back to work. He "stirred 'em up," he rebaited, he dug his chisel into the ice for a wind-anchor and sat down with his coat collar up and leaned back against the wind which pushed on him like a moving wall. A tipe snapped up somewhere in the dusk and Bill got to it, crawling, digging in with his chisel to help him. He called it a wind-bite when he saw the line lying still and he pulled the loop out of water, carelessly, to restore it to the trigger—and suddenly the line was snatched from his hand. It seared his flesh as he grabbed it and snubbed. He felt the swooping dive of the laker, well hooked. Fifty feet of fight, and Bill heard another trigger snap at his left.

Things happened fast, from then on. Bill landed a small lake trout and rushed to the second hole and found almost all the line out. He had a long, hard fight with a trout of ten or twelve pounds on that one but got him. He almost lost him after he had him out on the ice, for the hook shook loose and the *Cristy* flopped and slid, with the wind helping him, toward another hole. Bill had to tackle the fish like a football player and kill him

with his clasp-knife, his hands shaking so he could hardly hold it.

Two of his lines were now all snarled and freezing into cat's cradles and he had to abandon efforts to untangle them. Then a third tipe rattled and he scrambled to the dimly seen flag that waved its red warning.

The afternoon run had indeed come, very late, but with a rush, and Bill totted up five lake trout that would weigh over forty pounds before his flags stopped waving at him. Forty pounds of flesh, solid food for him and Sam. Food that would save them. Food that would take them both to Fort Frances, where their gold would buy them enough beefsteaks to take the taste of trout away and bulge their bellies.

Right now Bill could taste those trout, baked, fried, broiled, boiled, any old way. His mouth drooled. He looked toward the cabin. He could see nothing but a dark line of rock ridge. He wanted another fish before he had to quit, a big one, just to show Sam that his dope on ice-fishing was right, good and right. He forgot, for the moment, that he was going to have to spend the night outside the cabin—unless——

His last rig that was not a hopeless mess drew his exclusive attention, and meanwhile darkness came and the wind roared through the woods and struck the ice with such power that Bill had to anchor himself even when he sat down, with the chisel between his legs, to keep from being skidded along. The cold made ice rapidly, the booming was continuous and somewhat frightening. The wind helped make that, as it was sucked down between lofty ridges and struck the flat, solid surface of the lake. It made actual but imperceptible waves in the ice-field, waves that Bill did not realize; he thought that funny feeling was from hunger-waves in his stomach.

He sat and shielded his solitary baited rig with his body and waited for "the big one." It became pitch dark. Bill tucked his hands under his coat; his sheep-lined mittens, flung down beside a hole in a hurry had long since been swept away by the wind. He had only a damp pair of old canvas gloves in his pocket.

"Flip!" The spruce bow flew up and the bit of flannel hit Bill in the eye. He scratched for the line on the ice, with numb fingers and could not find it until the wind whipped it across his face, and when he did get hold of it he knew that the grandpa of all *Cristys* had got hold of his hook. The pull tumbled him off balance and when he got to his feet his chisel fell across and almost into the hole. When he finally got steady the laker was running away from him like a wild horse.

He snubbed down, gradually, winding the line around his arm. He faced the wind and it gave him pulling power—and he needed it. That laker gave him such a battle as he never remembered having, ice-fishing or trolling.

When the fierce fight was over, after fifteen minutes of hard labor, Bill was wound up in wind-tangled silk, and a flopping fish more than a yard long was threatening to brain him with its tail.

Bill managed to kill it with the chisel, then cut himself free of line with the chisel blade, his clothing wet enough to freeze runners on him, so that he slid more easily when he fell.

HE CRAWLED about and located the rest of his catch, mumbling to himself about "gran'pa Namaycush" and laughing into the wind like a *windigo* or wild spirit. His bait-pail was gone, now, and he remembered hearing it go sliding and banging away while he had fought Cristy's grandsire but he didn't care, except that it was the camp water-pail and Sam would be sore—but oh, boy, what a feast of trout broiled over coals they would have!

He spent a bad half hour, with freezing fingers, stringing his fish. His hands were as stiff as candles, and as numb. The

northwester, which was more north than west kept on. He turned his back to it, squatting astride his chisel and whipped his hands until he could feel them, then he began to push himself westerly, toward the distant shore. There he would find wood, shelter, roast a fish, plan how to get back to camp.

How he managed to travel at all is a mystery, for he was hampered by some fifty to sixty pounds of fish, tangled lines, tipe, wet clothing, ice-coated shoe-pacs, and he was as weak as a rag.

"Anyhow," he muttered, chuckling, "I'm the type of toff can catch 'em with the tipe. Hum! If fishes is fish; then tipes is tipe. I got Sam in a corner, now, by Crook!"

Carefully Bill edged his way out of the circle of fish-holes, slowly he inched his way across the lake, into the wind, quartering, so as to travel west. An hour later he halted, slipped, slid and went flat in water on the ice. The shore loomed, a blacker smudge against the general blackness, fifty feet or perhaps fifty yards ahead; he could not tell. He floundered and got up. He made out, close to him, too close for comfort, a white line and much lapping and grinding of water and broken ice.

"By Crook, it's the bloody channel!" he cried. "The wind must 'ave shifted faster'n I could walk and I followed it and went the wrong way. By Crook and the devil, it's a wonder I didn't walk right into the water!"

He turned about and traveled, now, with the wind. Five minutes later his clothing was a mass of icy mail. It was somewhat of a blessing, for it kept out the wind and he felt wet only at some points, such as elbows and knees. He slid and slithered, the wind at his right shoulder, back across the ice-field, guarding against his own ice-holes by pushing his chisel ahead of him, wondering whether the wind really had shifted as much as he thought—and despite all his caution, he stepped again into water that had overflowed the ice and flopped flat. He kept on sliding, the wind pushing him, only stopping himself by jabbing the chisel into the ice—about one yard from black water with whitecaps on it.

"By the bloody Crook!" he chattered. "I'm travelin' in circles like a man lost in the woods!"

On second thought, this seemed impossible, for if so, how did it happen that the wind remained in the same quarter as it was when he had retreated, the first time? It couldn't change again, so fast. And yet, here was the channel, evidently.

"On both sides of the lake!" Bill burst out. "By Crook, I guess I am marooned!"

He crawled backwards like a crab and sat still on dry ice until he froze to it.

"There, that's somethin' like it!" he comforted himself when he discovered himself anchored and tore at his wet gloves to get them off and warm his hands.

HIS tipe, banging at his back, made Bill peevish. He was bound up in fish-line again from one hank of which hung the load of frozen fish. He got out his knife, dropped it, fumbled for it for two minutes, couldn't open the blade when he found it, used his chisel to cut the fish loose, then flung himself on them in a panic as they started to slide away.

After that he sat on them. The fish froze to the ice, Bill's pants froze to the fish. It began to snow.

Bill was lost, hopelessly lost on what seemed an island of ice. He didn't know which was which. The wind had tricked and confused him. He decided to stay sitting. His body slumped, as he gave up, momentarily, the bewildering battle. He woke from a cat-nap, surprised at himself, and lunged for his chisel, which had fallen from his knee-grip. It was a life-preserver, an iron life-preserver. It was to be so, some more.

Bill began to realize that he would freeze to death if he sat there in the wind, without shelter, but there was nothing he could

lay a hand to, not even enough snow, to pile up a burrow. The ice was as clean as a waxed ballroom floor and more slippery. The mound of frozen fish firmly fastened to the ice alone offered Bill a place to stick to.

Bill pondered, deeply, reducing the situation to its lowest common denominator —and the answer was *ice*.

"By Crook, I gotta build me an igloo!" he exclaimed, wearily but hopefully. "A snow-house without snow, like bricks without straw."

By the way, where was Sam? Safe and snug in the cabin eating beans and pork and sourdough bread, keeping twice-boiled coffee hot on the stove, the beans in a pan, covered up.

"I hope he don't put his feet in 'em," Bill mumbled, licking his stiff lips and kicking his heels to see if he had them on.

"Damn the ice. Here I am out on the ice with a good half hundred pounds of fresh fishes—fish—starvin' to death. Mebbe I could start a fire with them tip-ups —tipe."

But the tip-ups or tipe were gone with the wind.

Mechanically Bill fumbled for the makin's, but couldn't hold a cigarette paper in his stiff fingers. He remembered Sam telling him a thousand times—he ought to smoke a pipe. Tears ran down his cheeks and he "Crook cursed" himself for a weakling, a quitter, threshed his hands until they ached, thrust them in his icy gloves, grabbed the chisel, braced his heel against his fish mound and tore himself loose.

Then, with a crazy cry he faced the wind and began to cut ice.

AN HOUR later the architect of his fate, Bill Musgrave, sat huddled in the lee of a half-shelter fashioned out of thin ice-cakes. It rose four feet high, was six feet long, curving about in wings to shut off the fiendish wind, slanted like the tower of Pisa, but would not fall unless summer came, for Bill had used water as mortar, between the cakes, splashing it over all the structure with his chisel. It froze as it fell and the wind drove snow into the cracks and sealed the wall.

Bill lay atop a pile of stiff trout and let the rest of the world swoop by. He was warm. His labor had stirred his blood, the warmth of his body encased in frozen clothing which insulated him, made him feel as if he had crawled into an iceberg that had an oven in it. Only his hands and feet were cold. He tucked his hands up opposite sleeves and drew his feet under him—and slept.

When daylight came the "igloo" loomed as a white mound on a vast white plain, for the snow had thickened as Bill had prayed, and Bill was part of the mound, well protected. Fisherman's luck was with him. He would surely have frozen, slowly, to death, save for the down from Mother Carey's chickens.

Bill awoke when Sam Reynolds shook him by the shoulder. He opened his eyes and looked up, unbelievingly into his partner's anxious face and heard Sam rasp out:

"You damn polar bear! Why didn't you come ashore?"

Bill blinked and tugged vainly to get his hands free. The sleeves of his mackinaw had frozen together.

"The blinkin' canoe blowed off the ice," Bill explained stupidly. "Did you find it all right?"

"I knowed it would go. I got it. But why in hell didn't you *walk ashore?*"

"You think I'm Saint Peter, or somethin'?" demanded Bill. "Mebbe a channel swimmer."

He struggled to rise but could not. Sam had to pull his sleeves apart and rip him loose from his fish—and Sam did not see the fish, they were so well covered with snow. Bill staggered, stamped his numb feet, stared stupidly in the direction his igloo faced, eastward, and his jaw dropped as he saw that he was less than fifty feet

from shore. And it was the shore on which the cabin stood, and Sam's tracks showed in the snow, where he had walked out—on solid ice.

"By Crook! I knowed it was cold but I didn't think it was cold enough to freeze over the channel, like that," he gasped.

"It wasn't," said Sam briefly. *"The wind blowed the ice to shore."*

Bill blinked again, turned and glanced west and saw, over toward that shore, the blackness of a wide run of open water. The whole ice-field had moved in the night, as he had wandered from one side of it to the other, finding open water both times.

"Well, come on along and eat," urged Sam. "I shot a porkypine."

"Say! What d'ye think I constructed this 'ere ice-house for?" husked Bill. "Gimme that chisel!"

"You big hunk of walrus-hide, you don't mean you want to fish some more? Look here, if you can't eat porkypine, you can have the pork and beans. I saved most of 'em for you. I couldn't eat no more of 'em."

He pulled from his pocket a much squashed sandwich—his lunch that he had not touched, and offered it to Bill.

Bill ignored it.

"Say, you oughta seen the one which got away from me!" he babbled, chiseling away at the heap in the snow-filled igloo.

"You gone nuts?" demanded Sam, grabbing Bill by the arm as Bill stooped over. "Lay off that digging up ice."

Sam was strong and he pulled Bill away from the igloo, chisel, frozen fish and all, and both their feet slipped and they went down with fish on top of them.

"Say!" growled Sam, hovering over the tremendous catch, on his hands and knees. "Say, you don't mean to tell me that you catched these with them tip-ups?"

"No, I catched them with tipe," chuckled Bill, almost hysterical now. "How many times'ave I got to tell you a tip-up is a bird and a tipe is an apparatus for catchin' fish through the ice?"

"I'll bet you the price of the biggest dictionary you can buy it ain't so," declared Sam. "When we get to Fort Frances—"

BY THE time they had got to Fort Frances the bet had grown to formidable stakes. Finally Sam bet his shirt, the red flannel undershirt, against Bill's ice-chisel, which he insisted on taking, declaring it had saved his life and would help balance the rude sledge they had made.

At the hotel, full of beefsteak, fried potatoes, fried eggs, gravy, butter, raised bread, pie, pickles, beer, and overflowing with good nature, the partners, surrounded by an awe-struck circle whose eyes bulged at the gold stake the pair had brought down, Bill Musgrave opened a ten pound dictionary that he held on his knees and solemnly turned to the "T's" and "Ti's."

He read aloud, in triumph:

"Tip-up: The spotted sand-piper (b) Hangling, a tilt, tilter, tilt-up."

"Tipe: An apparatus for catching mice, rabbits, etc. (b) Hangling, a tilt."

"Tilt: The black-necked or Mexican sand-piper (n) Hangling, a tilt-up."

"So what?" crowed Sam Reynolds. "So what?"

Bill's lips moved soundlessly as he reread the definitions, and his wind-bitten, frosted face wrinkled into a snarl of lines.

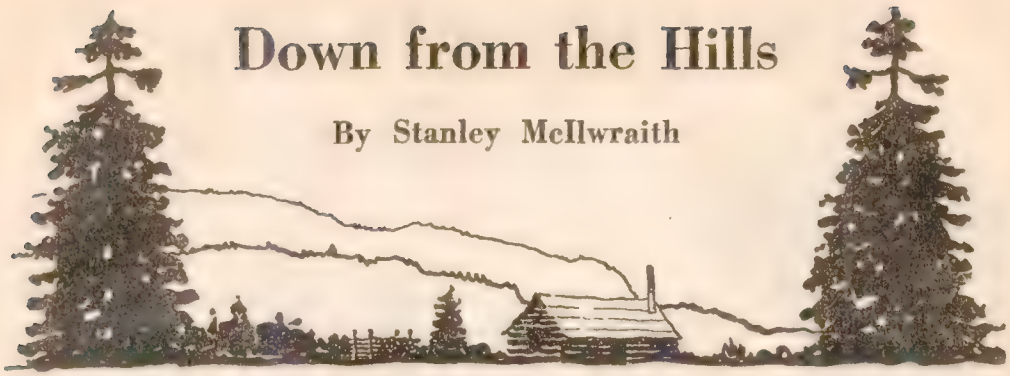
"Well, by Crook!" he cried, as he turned the pages and finally got to the title-page. "This ain't a English dictionary! It's American, by Crook!"

The bets were off—but Bill Musgrave continued to call his tip-ups tipe, and to catch fish with them all winter on Rainy Lake.

He was a fisherman, by Crook—or hook.

Down from the Hills

By Stanley McIlwraith



DOWN from the hills, rugged and coarsely clad,
His eager eyes devoured the city scene.
Adventure, this, to a rough mountain lad
Whose feet were used to soft and twisting paths
Among the pines, the laurel and the shad.

"Here, Mister! Where you going? Where you from?"
Brown eyes took in the blue coat, scowling face.
"My cabin's on th' spur below Ol' Krum.
I jest come down t' see a city friend."
"Keep moving, then." A muttered, "Country scum!"

A sudden jump. The squeal of angry brakes.
"Look out, you blasted fool! Ain't you got eyes?"
The driver leans out of his cab and shakes
A furious fist. "I should'a run y'down."
The huge truck rolls, rattling its high strakes.

Two days of this; veiled tolerance of a host
Who had found welcome in a mountain hut,
With many a hearty back-slap, and the boast
Of showing the city to his mountain guide.
The city that was just an ugly ghost.

What joy to find the cabin once again!
Beside the storm-scarred pine, the granite rock.
Green valley spreading down to its wide plain;
The calm, sure peace of mountains, and to hear
The wind howl free—and stand out in the rain.

THE DUTCHMAN GOES A-HUNTING

By R. V. GERY

Author of Many Stories of Inspector Kappie De Vries of the Dutch East Indies Police

I

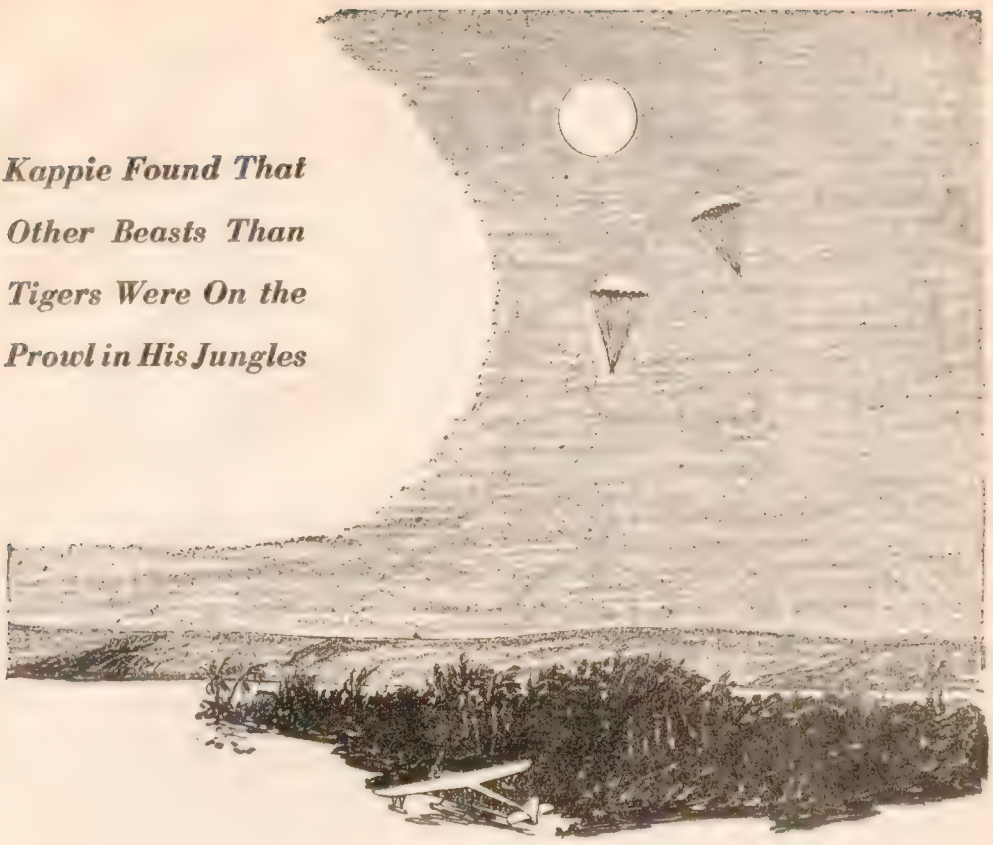
IN THE venerable Dutch-colonial city of Makassar, competent observers ever held that Mynheer Inspector Kappie De Vries, if slightly wacky upon certain subjects and at certain times, was upon the whole a *slim duyvil*—a pretty bright citizen.

Even before the big international game of throttle-my-neighbor commenced, back in the palmy days of peace, the excellent Inspector had the reputation of being a hard-headed sort of a number who might act the spectacular goat upon occasion, but whose performances in that character had a surprising habit of turning out practical and to the point. In Makassar, the broad-sterned Hollanders grinned at his antics—and when the shadow of strife came creeping close and closer, their smiles grew even wider.

They approved of their Kappie a whole lot, the stout Dutchmen.

Nevertheless, there was an occasion when they really fell to scratching their bullet heads over him, and that was the time when he took a hunting-trip—he and Colonel Gevaerts, the big-nosed soldier and military commandant who was only a trifle less *slim*, and less crazy, than Kappie himself.

It began with the pair of them sitting, behind strictly closed doors in the colonel's



Kappie Found That Other Beasts Than Tigers Were On the Prowl in His Jungles

citadel offices, for three quarters of one sweltering night.

They had kept similar vigils before, plenty of times, and it was nothing new for them to see the tropic dawn in. But hitherto most of such exploits had been occasions for song and story, the social glass, and all the trappings of two of the most accomplished topers in the wet East.

This meeting, though, was strictly formal, strictly business, and dry as a desert. Its subject matter was certain little scraps of paper, with spidery writing on them, the recent movements in queer places of still queerer individuals, a big, deep-windowerd house in the Leidenstraat—a house that had a familiar, fried-egg flag outside it and some devious brown gentlemen within: all these things, and high matters of world-policy as well, engaged Kappie's and the colonel's attention in those sultry midnight hours.

Especially the house in the Leidenstraat, and the tough, agile little men that lived there.

"The *vervloekt* monkeys!" Gevaerts said, tugging at his scimitar mustaches. "They are up to something."

That was an understatement and both men knew it.

The Japs in that consulate of theirs were forever up to something. Kappie grunted feelingly.

"Ja," he said. "Beyond doubt that is true, Gevaerts. They are clever, these little scamps, clever as sin. They have their hooks on this place, and some day, when they are ready—— No, I do not like it at all, Mynheer. They are altogether too pleasant, almighty!"

He had hit the nail on the head, after his forthright, sledge-hammer fashion. The little men from Tokyo had always had the silken-glove technic pretty well developed, but just lately—since the world had exploded, ten thousand miles away—their

manners had become even more gracious and accommodating.

But—they wanted these islands, with all their riches, and there wasn't a Dutchman who didn't know it. Least of all those highly cynical and competent gentlemen, Kappie De Vries and Gevaerts. Those scribbled, spidery bits of writing on rice-paper before them added up to a queerly suggestive total. They were reports from a dozen different agents scattered about Celebes, and they all said much the same thing.

NEVERTHELESS, Kappie had been regarding them without enthusiasm.

"All very nice!" he had growled. "They trade, and they cut markets, and they penetrate peacefully here, there and everywhere. As if we did not know that; they have been at that game ever since I can remember. But there is more than that, Gevaerts—plenty more, or my name is not what it is. You agree, no?"

The colonel did agree and said so with fluency. Like Kappie himself he was more than a trifle psychic when it came to trouble. His huge nose was twitching with the sulphurous smell of it right now, and the burden of his song, there in the early dawn, was that they were up to something, the very-damned monkeys, and *wat drommel!* it was about time action was taken in the matter.

Kappie lit another of his poisonous cheroots and went to the window. "Action?" he said meditatively. "To be sure—action. But what kind of action, my friend? We cannot afford to stir up a fuss."

That was the point. Neither side desired anything in the nature of the well-known "incident"—the Dutchmen for obvious reasons and the Japanese because there were other folk interested in Pacific equilibrium just now, people they urgently desired to keep in good humor. It was a puzzler, and Kappie De Vries swore heartily, looking out of the window at the flowering shrubberies and tall casuarinas in the citadel garden.

And he was still there, meditatively exuding brimstone, when something broke. A man came crawling out of the bushes, into the growing light of day. He was a wizened little fellow, a native, in a loincloth and not much else, and Kappie De Vries stiffened at sight of him, out there among the flowers.

"Goedverdom!" he muttered. "Will you look at that?"

He flung open the big French window and stepped out onto the dewy grass. Without a word he picked the newcomer up in his powerful arms and carried him into the room. The man's eyes were closed now and he was to all appearances in complete, utter collapse—though there did not seem to be a wound on him.

"Schnapps!" rasped Kappie. "Gevaerts, the schnapps—" and the fiery colonel brought it in his own official fingers. They forced a draught of it down the man's throat, and he winked, gasped, and sat up.

"Tuan!" he said to Kappie hoarsely. "I have news—"

Kappie patted him on the shoulder. *"Ja, ja!"* he said easily. "You have news, Ipoh, to be sure. Be still now and take more of the schnapps, and then you shall tell us what is this news, and why, almighty, you are in this state, eh?"

He was glancing over the man's figure all the while, noting the signs of exhaustion with pursed lips. Colonel Gevaerts was also professionally stirred; he had seen men like this before, with cut and bleeding feet, and half-healed scratches and tears on their legs.

He was an old jungle-fighter, the colonel, and he knew the signs.

"You have been in the *rukh?"* he inquired, and Ipoh nodded.

"Ay, *tuan,"* he said. "In the *rukh.* There are strange matters going forward there. Devils, I would believe, except that your lordships say there are no devils."

He shuddered a little in spite of him-

self. Kappie was watching him carefully. This Ipoh was another of his secret service corps, from an outlying district sixty miles away up in the hills. Moreover, he was not as a rule given to anything in the nature of hysteria.

"Very good," he said quietly. "Let us hear about these devils of yours, Ipoh. As you say, there are some strange things in the *rukh*."

Ipoh spoke, in rapid, hushed Malay, for ten minutes, and neither Kappie nor Gevaerts interrupted him by so much as a whisper. But by the time he had finished Kappie's hard, sapphire-blue eyes were bulging out of his head, and the colonel's nose had deepened at least three shades of its native mahogany. The pair of them contemplated one another in silence—an overstuffed, emotional silence—and then Gevaerts in his turn began to curse.

He swore in a steady stream, fighting-man's unchecked, untrammeled language, and maybe it was fortunate for Ipoh the Malay that most of it went clear over his head. Kappie, however, regarded him with frank admiration and when he had finished, nodded solemnly.

"Good!" he commented. "I could not have done better myself, old friend. I agree with every word. But now, in the name of ten million devils, what is next? What are we to do, you and I, about this accursed affair?"

II

THERE was a little man in that building in the Leidenstraat who was quite typical of these modern, streamlined days.

His name was Itsuki—Daimio Itsuki—and he was a major in the Japanese army. Nevertheless, he was outwardly a good deal different to the accepted standards for such, being a genial little body with a round, gnome-like face, and a great way with him among the ladies.

There was very little of the grim old-time warrior about Major Itsuki, and that made him about twice as dangerous, in the view of Kappie and some others, than if he had gone around breathing fire and slaughterings, and girt with all the military pomp of the Orient.

He came out of the consulate around noon on the morning after Ipoh's dramatic arrival, and turned up the street toward the hotel for lunch. The first person he ran into, there on the warm and crowded pavement, was none other than Kappie himself—immaculate as usual in his drill uniform, and fairly oozing bonhomie.

"Aha!" Kappie chuckled. "It is you, Mynheer Major, eh? And what is the news today? Do you still chase these Chinese *schellums*, over yonder—or is it maybe their turn for awhile?"

There was a mordant tang in his query, and with most of Itsuki's race trouble would have followed it, but Kappie knew his man. The major merely grinned and waggled his hands in a little deprecatory gesture.

"That is not fair," he said. "Just now, as you know very well, matters up there are in a state of—flux. We are permitting them a certain amount of rope so that they may hang themselves all the better, you understand."

"I follow you completely," said Kappie without the flicker of a muscle. "An admirable tactic, Mynheer. And now," he added suddenly, as if he were just remembering something, "I have a message for you, from my wife. She desires to consult with you upon some little society

affair or other—me, I fear I am not abreast of such things—and she instructs me to bring you to lunch with her. No excuses, Mynheer, if you please; the affair is urgent!"

He was twinkling all over, and the major fell into his mood readily enough. "I shall be charmed," he said, and the pair strutted off together to Kappie's bungalow down the shady by-street—and to Micaela, Kappie's lady wife, who was a pretty bright citizen, too.

Over one of her knock-'em-dead meals, and with much thrust-and-parry chaff, Itsuki expanded, as far as his cautious little nature allowed. He discussed matters pertinent to the high society of Makassar with all the airs of a courtier and squire of dames, and Kappie, looking at him, wondered that fire did not descend from above and strike him dead then and there where he sat.

He reflected, grimly, that in view of Ipoh's very recent revelations the descent-from-heaven metaphor was upon the whole a mighty appropriate one.

A sudden noise of footsteps on the veranda made him half-turn.

"Almighty!" he remarked. "Look who comes here—it is that incredible old animal Gevaerts!"

THE colonel was in a hurry. He even appeared to have been running, and his eyes were wide with excitement and a sort of holy enthusiasm. He barely found his manners in time to salute Micaela from the doorway.

"Kappie!" he exclaimed. "Eleven feet! You hear that—eleven feet!"

The Inspector looked at Itsuki, and a large wink distorted his morocco-leather face.

"Excuse him, Mynheer Major," he said. "The poor fellow is taken so sometimes—it is not catching. Sit down, Gevaerts my friend; sit down and inform us quietly what is all this about eleven feet."

The colonel raved. "Eleven feet, I tell you!" he repeated. "They measured it—its stride. It is an eleven feet specimen, and by all that's holy, I leave tonight for it. You will come too, of course."

Kappie had stopped grinning and sat up in his chair. "You mean to tell me——" he began, but Gevaerts interrupted him.

"A tiger!" he exploded. "An eleven foot tiger—a man-eater, Kappie. A hunter I know, one of the jungle boys, sent in not half an hour ago; he swears the beast is perfect. You will come, no?"

Kappie De Vries glanced at his wife, and Micaela looked across at Itsuki with a faint, amused twitch of the mouth.

"What am I expected to say, Mynheers?" she inquired. "You are crazy, all of you, when there is any tiger-hunting to be mentioned. Of course you will go, Kappie. Where is this famous tiger to be found, Mynheer Colonel?"

Gevaerts twisted his mustache. "He is up in the Ontong Padang country," he said. "In the hills there. And, almighty, what am I about?" he went on. "Mynheer Major, what of you? Can you not steal time and accompany us, the Inspector and me?"

There was a tiny silence, just for an instant. Major Itsuki had been listening with good humored tolerance to the ravings of Gevaerts, but now all of a sudden he had gone cold. The smile was still there, but it was a mechanical, fixed affair, and the gleam of entertainment had gone out of his eyes.

"I— No, I do not think so, Colonel," he said with an effort. "I am not what you call a sportsman, I fear. This shooting of animals does not appeal to me. It is a foolish weakness, no doubt."

He was recovering himself as he spoke, but the moment was an awkward one. Kappie broke the tension with a laugh.

"It is all right," he said. "It is quite all right, Mynheer. Maybe we ourselves would not be so mightily entertained by some of your Japanese sports, after all. Gevaerts and I will go, though, and see

what there is to be seen up yonder, and whether there are eleven-foot tigers there after all. He is a great liar, this Gevaerts, when it comes to tales of hunting—a big, *vervloekt* liar, *ja!*"

So, it was passed off, and in awhile Major Itsuki of the Japanese army took his leave, bowing. Kappie De Vries stood on the veranda, watching him pass through the garden gate and up the shaded street. Then he turned back into the house.

"Well?" he said.

Micaela was sitting on the couch, a curious, obstinate expression on her pretty face. Gevaerts was looking very uncomfortable indeed. Kappie glanced from one to the other of them, and his jaw tightened.

"Eh?" he queried. "And what is this? You, Micaela—you have been saying something, no?"

His wife had, and she said it again, with freedom and point. She said that as far as she was concerned, the pair of them could forget all about their joint tiger-hunt up in the Ontong Padang country. She was not going to have Kappie De Vries exposed to whatever it was that unlady-like-word Japanese had had got up there. She had had just about enough of such affairs.

"Ja?" said Kappie, in a very odd voice indeed. *"Ja,* Micaela? It is like that, eh? Now, you will listen to me——"

That, however, was precisely what Micaela would not do. She said so in very high terms—so high and with such venom that Colonel Gevaerts took occasion to step hastily outside, with his ears tingling. It was some moments before Kappie joined him, sweating profusely.

"There are times," he began, "when it is necessary for a man to put his foot down, Gevaerts—"

The colonel coughed. From what he had heard, if any foot had been put down, it had not been Kappie De Vries' size twelves. The Inspector led the way out to the street.

"You understand," he observed anxiously, "that we are still going tiger-hunting, Gevaerts. There is some very funny business up there, after all, and—well, Micaela or no, I am going. I am not yet tied to her apron-strings, almighty!"

With which he stalked off, leaving Gevaerts fingering the nose and looking after him with a profoundly sympathetic expression.

The good colonel was not married, a state of affairs which he frequently ascribed to the direct intervention of heaven. He returned to his quarters, shaking his head, and plunged into preparations for the morrow.

IN THE Leidenstraat, Major Itsuki was sitting in his office, deep in thought.

He had had, he figured ruefully, one hell of a jolt there at the lunch-table. If anybody else among the Dutchmen had mentioned the Ontong Padang hills, it might possibly have been different; but Itsuki had considerable of an opinion of Kappie and Gevaerts, and the more he thought about that tiger-hunt, the more it stank.

Because there were certain matters up there for which he was personally responsible to Tokyo. Matters which would not bear the light of day being thrown upon them in the least. Matters whose airing just now might provoke one of those "incidents"—and a flaring one.

And this was the precise spot Kappie De Vries and Gevaerts had picked, out of all the Indies, to go a-running after an unnecessary eleven-foot tiger.

Major Itsuki sat perfectly still behind his desk, mulling that one over. He was neither gracious nor courtly now, and a lot of the streamlined modernism had departed from him. In fact, there were some intensely medieval notions taking shape inside that neat little head of his as he touched the bell at his side.

A young fellow in a trim silk suit entered and stood waiting. Itsuki considered

him for an instant and then motioned to a chair.

"Sit down, Koga," he said. "I have something to tell you—"

He spoke in a low, level voice for some minutes, and Koga—who happened to be another officer of the Imperial Japanese army—blinked at him in growing perturbation.

"But, Major-*san*," he said doubtfully, "this is bad—this is very bad."

Itsuki nodded. "It is not good," he agreed. "I do not know whether these people have discovered anything. Maybe not—although they are neither of them fools, Koga, remember that. But whether they have or have not, we must be on our guard. There must be no trouble about this business, you understand—no trouble at all. The time is not yet ripe."

Koga assented readily enough. The time was certainly not yet ripe, and—well, there must be no trouble at all, up there in the Ontong Padang. He found Major Itsuki looking at him with a queer, intense expression, and in silence. After a moment he rose.

"Yes," he said under his breath. "I understand, Major-*san*. There is to be no trouble—no trouble at all."

And he went out. He was a remarkably intelligent little body, this Lieutenant Koga of the Imperial Japanese army.

III

KAPPIE DE VRIES was in his office, conferring with the estimable Sergeant Jan. He was still sweating lightly after his run-in with Micaela, and his temper was more than a little ruffled.

"*Ja!*" he was saying. "I am going away, Jan, for a week, hunting in the hills with the colonel. You will stay here and see to things, you comprehend—"

Sergeant Jan saluted with about as much expression as one of his own country's cheeses. He was a master of that kind of dumb insolence, and he employed it here because he didn't for one instant believe this tale of the tiger-hunt. He was once again being left out of something and he didn't appreciate that fact.

"Understood, Mynheer," he muttered, and Kappie fixed him with a baleful blue eye.

"I am glad to hear it, Jan," he said. "I do not want any funny business this time, if you please. You stay here—it is an order—until I return, or it will be the worse for you, Mynheer. You grow insubordinate!" His tough expression suddenly relaxed into a knowing smile. "You do not approve of this little expedition, eh?" he queried.

Jan blinked and said nothing. He was a complete master of the profane silence, as well, and Kappie let him stew for awhile in that mood. The telephone tinkled and he picked it up, the smile still on his face.

"*Ja?*" he said. "Yes, this is De Vries? Who? Who did you say? Almighty, and what may you be doing here? I thought you were—— What is that? At the club? To be sure, to be sure—I am there in a moment. Wait for me, my friend—wait for me!"

He picked up his helmet, excitement and gratification written all over him, and went to the door. With his hand on it he turned back.

"Recollect!" he said to Jan. "There is no funny business!"

And he strode off, down to the club veranda, where Makassar's best and brightest forgathered to drink pink gins and discuss world-politics in interminable session. There was a young man sitting there, with an out-of-date copy of a New York newspaper before him, and a quizzical look on his clean-cut features at sight of Kappie.

"Well, well!" he said rising and holding out a hand. "Long time no see, Inspector, eh? Let's see—it was up in Saigon, wasn't it?"

Kappie chuckled. "I remember," he said. "What a night, eh? You were waltz-

ing with a *gendarme* when I saw you last, I believe, Mister Spike!"

Spike Murphy nodded reflectively. "I'd one swell job, too, explaining to the boss," he admitted. "I hadn't quite got wise to the sort of behavior that's expected of a guy in this job, I guess. And somehow I've got an idea you led me astray, Kappie."

The Inspector continued to chuckle shamelessly. *"Ja,* without doubt," he said. "A policeman, corrupting a diplomatist—that is a very amusing idea, to be sure. You are still in the same line of business, eh—representing Uncle Sam and poking your nose into other people's affairs?"

"Sure," said Spike. "They've transferred me to the consulate here, though. Plenty doing in this neck of the woods, they inform me."

Kappie De Vries was just raising a pink gin to his lips, but now he lowered it all at once. A slightly startled, watchful expression slid across his broad face, as if a notion had suddenly struck him. He was thinking about this Spike Murphy, and his probable job at the U. S. consulate there just now. A bright, personable young gentleman, this Spike, much given to amusement and social festivities, but not a fool—not by any means anybody's fool. He had been put there for a purpose, or Kappie didn't know Washington, or Pacific problems.

"Ja," he said curiously. "There is plenty doing, Mynheer Spike, no doubt. It is very interesting, this situation."

Spike shrugged, but there was a twinkle in his eye.

"Damn right it's interesting," he observed. "What with one thing and another—I guess you've your own work cut out, hereabouts, the way things are, hunh?"

Kappie finished his drink and called for another one before he replied. "I should like a few moments quiet talk with you, Spike," he said, almost inaudibly and out of the corner of his mouth. "In an hour from now, say—behind the Mariakirk."

Spike nodded imperceptibly. His eye was upon a figure across the street, a slim, neat figure in a silk suit, threading its way among the many colored crowd. Kappie followed his gaze, and his own eye hardened a little. There was something about young Lieutenant Koga of the Japanese Air Force that gave him a slight attack of the shivers. Spike Murphy looked at him all at once.

"Yeah," he said absently. "Okay, Kappie—I'll be there. Grand day, isn't it?"

Kappie lit a cheroot. *"Ja,"* he agreed placidly. "It is, as you say, a beautiful day, Mynheer Spike—a lovely day, for those that care for such things."

LIEUTENANT KOGA entered Itsuki's office. "I have a report, Major-*san,*" he announced with a pale smirk. "I may proceed?"

The major had been sitting lost in thought, a frown on his brow, but now he stirred and sat up.

"Continue," he said. "It is as we imagined, eh?"

Koga bowed. "As you foresaw, honorable one," he replied diplomatically. "They leave tonight, the two of them, to hunt—it is said—a great tiger in the Ontong Padang. A runner came in with news of it last night, it appears."

"We have contacted this runner?" Itsuki asked, but Koga shook his head.

"No," he said. "It was not possible. They are concealing him, I imagine. Something is not as it should be here; I am sure of it, Major-*san.* And moreover," he said, "I have just seen the policeman drinking with that new American attaché in the club. That gentleman, too——"

He broke off with a little grimace, and for awhile there was a silence in that office. Finally Itsuki rose.

"Yes," he said. "It is difficult, Koga. There must be no trouble—and yet, they must find nothing in the Ontong Padang. Nothing at all, you hear. You had better go away and consider what is to be done

in the matter—unless, that is, you already have ideas."

Koga smiled, and it was like a bolt of cold lightning running across his face.

"Maybe I have," he said in a half-whisper, and the major stared at him.

"Be careful, Koga," he said.

Koga rubbed his hands together. "Yes," he said, "I shall be careful, Major-*san*. I shall be very careful indeed."

IV

ABOUT six o'clock that evening Micaela De Vries bade her husband an affectionate farewell, and saw him walk down the garden-path to a large, heavily-laden automobile that stood in the street there. Colonel Gevaerts was at the wheel, his magnificent nose a beacon in the evening light —and there was no doubt, even to the most careful observer, what was in the wind.

The car bristled with sporting goods, rifles, ammunition, tents and all the paraphernalia of the hunter. Kappie himself carried a formidable repeating carbine and a huge hunting-knife girt about his middle.

The whole outfit looked as if it had come straight out of a catalogue, and even Kappie was grinning as he climbed in at Gevaerts' side.

"Let us go, almighty!" he said under his breath. "Before I explode. See, there is one of Itsuki's little gentlemen—right on the spot."

The little gentleman was a six-foot, sinister-looking coolie, shuffling along with a bamboo basket-carrier across his shoulder. Colonel Gevaerts sniffed as he let his clutch in and went roaring up the street.

"Amateur!" he observed.

Micaela, back at the garden-gate,watched the car out of sight, a peculiar expression on her pretty features. It might have been said, indeed, that she looked a trifle sinister as well. She had just been crossed by her own particular piece of property, Kappie De Vries, and that was a sensation she could never get used to.

And she was sniffing danger. She had a nose for that heady, intoxicating savor, had this descendant of Dyak sea-robbers. She was afraid, for Kappie—and she was angry as a wet jungle-cat as well.

She ran back into the house, got her hat, and marched straight downtown to Kappie's headquarters. There was someone there, she knew very well, who would be in a mood similar to her own.

Sergeant Jan was indeed in a complete state of fury—almost speechless. He sat behind Kappie's desk in the inner sanctum, chewing his fingers and glowering, while the clerks in the outer office toiled over their books and insects hummed steadily.

He had been left behind again, put on the shelf, sidetracked. It was getting to be a habit, this, of the Inspector's, and each time it occurred Jan grew touchier and less amenable. He got up now and began to prowl around the quiet room, muttering things to himself about very-damned tiger-hunts and *vervloekt* Japanese monkeys—and he was still in that condition of frenzy when the door opened and he found himself staring in some astonishment at Kappie's wife.

Micaela came directly to the point. "Jan," she said, "I wish to talk with you."

The sergeant made haste to show her to a chair. "*Ja*, Madame," he said. "Speak, if you please."

Micaela looked at him narrowly. "You know what it is I wish to say," she said curtly. "I—he has left me here, and you too, and gone off on this foolishness, and —I do not like it. There is something more here than tigers, Jan."

Jan shrugged. "So I think also, Madame," he said lugubriously. "But I do not see what is to be done in the matter. It is the Inspector's order."

Micaela pulled a face at him. "True," she said. "But—"

It was then that Jan broke all his conventions by putting up a hand and inter-

rupting his boss' wife. There had come a sound, a tiny scratching noise from a lattice blind on a rear window. They had, both of them, heard that signal before, and Jan was across the room in a flash.

"*Ja,* Ali," he said in a hoarse whisper. "What is it?"

The man in the dusk outside said something in fluttery hurried Malay. He was Kappie's pet undercover agent, and had been for years. That he was still strictly undercover was a tribute to his competence —there was very little of the amateur about this one—and what he said now was strictly to the point. Jan's jaw dropped, and he turned to Micaela.

"Madame," he said, "you had better go home. There is an affair here I must see to—at once."

Micaela said something by way of reply —something that Jan understood perfectly well; so well that he gasped and flung up his hands in a gesture of surrender.

"What was it?" Micaela demanded. "Tell, you!"

Jan hesitated just a second, but the look

on her dark, hawklike face was too much for him.

"Madame," he said fidgeting, "Ali has word that the Japanese—in the consulate there—are also going into the Ontong Padang—"

She smiled at him, not a very mirthful smile. "Hunting?" she queried, and Jan shook his head.

"I think not, Madame," he said drily. Micaela bit her finger thoughtfully.

"And," she said as if she were talking to herself, "it is not possible to get in touch with those two crazy men. That is it, eh?"

"There are three, Madame," said Jan. "They took the young Mynheer Murphy with them—from the American consulate."

Micaela sniffed. "Murphy?" she said. "I remember him, he and Kappie once—— Never mind. What are we going to do, Jan? Sit here and let these very-damned yellow men do what they wish with our people? They have something up there in the hills they wish to hide, no doubt. What is it, think you?"

Jan scratched his head dubiously. He had his ideas, to be sure, but they were not altogether the sort of notions he wanted to impart to Micaela just then.

"I do not know, Madame," he said woodenly, and Micaela called him a liar there and then.

"You do know, Mynheer," she said. "Or —you have thoughts on the matter. You will tell me, Jan, if you please, instantly!"

JAN told, with a good deal of grunting and wriggling, and Micaela stared at him. She knew a good deal about what went on behind the scenes in Makassar, but this was a new one, to be sure; new and horrible.

"Jan!" she gasped. "What are we going to do? They will be killed—the Japanese will kill them."

Sergeant Jan, for once, found enjoyment in hitting at a woman. "*Ja,* Madame," he said. "That is so—unless we prevent them. I was about to do so—if I am let alone!"

And he lumbered heavily out of the room. Micaela put her hand to her throat, and her eyes dilated. Never in the whole of her life had anyone, any man, spoken to her in just that tone. Not even Kappie De Vries in his stormiest moods had got

that amount of "out-of-my-way-woman!" into a pronouncement.

She stood staring after Jan for a minute, and then she set her teeth and ran helter-skelter after him.

KAPPIE DE VRIES sat at Gevaerts' side, lost in thought, as the car went bumping uphill over a very second-class road indeed.

To right and left was the cultivation, rubber-plantations and the beginnings of coffee. But ahead, the jungle-clad slopes and uplands of the Ontong Padang were visible, shadowy under a rising moon. It was ten or eleven o'clock now, and already beginning to grow chilly.

Gevaerts leaned forward all at once and snapped his lights off, with a sharp, definite gesture, as if this were the beginning of things. Kappie grunted assent.

"*Ja,* I think so," he said. "I certainly think so."

"We are twenty kilometers away yet," said the colonel, as if excusing himself for the precaution. "But automobiles are not so very common hereabouts."

Bits and scraps of tense conversation, not in the least fitted to a joyous expedition after an eleven-foot tiger. Spike Murphy, in the back seat among the camping equipment, had a powerful pair of field-glasses. From time to time he raised them to his eyes and swept the blue moonlit skies with them. The car lurched and swayed on, until the orderly cultivation died away on each side of it, and the road became, frankly and without concealment, a mere jungle-trail.

Gevaerts stopped the car under overhanging branches.

"Now," he said, "let us consider awhile, my friends. Ipoh's village is not far now, but we should have our story ready when we arrive there. And do not forget," he showed his teeth in a flash of mordant humor, "that we are likely to have company!"

They sat in the car, the three of them, talking in undertones, while the night slid on. From the jungle around them came faint sounds, squawks and flutterings and croonings, as the wild life took up again; but otherwise there was silence, except for the low voices in the shadow.

It was Gevaerts, with his jungle-trained ears, that heard it first. He cocked his head, lifting a long forefinger.

"Quiet!" he whispered. "Here is the company, I believe."

They held their breaths, and in a moment it came to them—the sound, quite unmistakeable and not to be concealed, of an engine, somewhere up in that milky-blue expanse above the trees. Kappie blinked, listening to it, and Spike Murphy swung his binoculars into action again, but Gevaerts shook his head.

"You would not see him," he said. "He is very high, that *schellum.* I wonder where he comes from, Kappie—there is no civilian flying permitted from any airport, save the mails. A ship in the straits, you think?"

Kappie swore admiringly. "No doubt, something of the sort," he agreed. "They are smart, these devils. Well, and now what, Mynheers?"

Gevaerts pressed his starter again and let the car creep forward.

"Now?" he said. "Why, now we shall go a-hunting, I suppose. Tigers—or whatever else may show itself, eh? Let us hope the sport will be good, that is all. I feel in the mood for a kill."

Kappie glanced at him. He had heard Gevaerts in this kind of a temper once or twice before in their combined history. He pursed his lips into a silent whistle. There were liable to be proceedings pretty soon, reflected Makassar's tough and uncompromising chief of police.

V

THE headman of Ipoh's jungle village —a mere rickle of palm huts in a clearing—was an ancient, wizened fellow in a loin-cloth and not much else. But he

was very well capable of adding two and two together, and he knew Colonel Gevaerts of old. It took a short ten minutes, in the seclusion of his house, to put him wise to the ins-and-outs of things.

"Ay, *tuan*," he said with a leer. "There be tigers and tigers, true. We have seen strange things here, such as you speak of. Men, it appeared to us—but if it seems to your honor that they be tigers, good. We shall show you these tigers."

"You had better," said Gevaerts drily. "But first, there is another matter to be looked to. Come with me."

He went outside into the clearing and indicated the dusty, baggage-piled car. With a few deft backs and turns he got it backed into the shade of a huge banyan-tree.

"This is a magic," he said to the headman, with a wink. "You have not seen this devil-wagon, you comprehend—neither you, nor your folk."

"We have not seen it," said the headman. "It is not here, *tuan*."

Gevaerts turned to Kappie. "You are ready?" he queried. "We have something of a walk, and these tigers, it appears, are visible sometimes at dawn. We had better be going, perhaps."

Kappie nodded and slung his repeater into the crook of his arm.

"*Ja*," he said. "Let us go and see what there is to see. You, Spike—had you better remain here, do you think? Maybe this is not just the affair for an American diplomat, after all."

Spike grinned. "Yeah?" he said. "Come again, brother. You can't shove me out that way."

He raked into his back pocket and then dragged out a flat pistol. Kappie looked at him with an odd smile.

"So?" he remarked. "Very good, Mynheer, very good. Only, remember that I warned you—"

"I'll remember," said Spike. "C'm'on, fellows—let's go!"

Ten minutes later they were in the depths of the jungle, heading uphill, with the headman and a couple of naked trackers for escort. Spike Murphy glanced upward at the night sky, barely visible through the interlacing branches. It was quiet up there now, nothing but the liquid moonlight and the faint stars. Spike pulled a grimace at it, though—a grimace of suspicion and hearty distaste.

What was going on up there didn't appeal to him a little bit. Hadn't, since it had first been practised, half a world from here, and months ago.

"Dirty sons!" he observed to himself, and swung his pistol. Kappie saw his frown and gesture and chuckled grimly.

"No doubt—no doubt!" he said. "But calling pretty little names does not alter matters, Mynheer Spike. Itsuki and his friends are proof against such things."

AT THAT moment, Major Itsuki and Lieutenant Koga of the Japanese army were in a hurry.

Their plane, a light seaplane—such as might very well be carried in the hold of a freighter—was sitting on the almost invisible waters of a lake, not five miles from the hunting-party. Itsuki and Koga were ashore, under the trees of a wooded, mysterious-looking island, a lump of foliage that seemed as if it were actually floating, unattached, on the limpid surface.

They were talking, hastily and with vigor, to a very queer group of persons indeed.

In any other surroundings, they would have been recognizable enough, this fifteen or twenty figures skulking there. You might see them almost any day, for instance, around the barracks in Osaka or Tokyo—little, tough men, short-legged and square in the shoulder; the striking force of the Japanese infantry.

But to find them here in central Celebes, in the middle of the Dutchmen's vital economy, was a curiosity. And their kit and equipment, hidden back in the tangled undergrowth beneath tarpaulins, was an-

other remarkable affair, and not in any way reassuring to anybody stumbling across it.

Itsuki was talking to them in rapid-fire, urgent Japanese, and what he said seemed to hit them hard, for they stared at one another uneasily, shuffling their feet and fingering their chins.

"Back!" the major told them. "Back under cover, all of you! And stay there—stay until I order you." He glanced round at Koga. "There are any more due to come in?" he inquired suddenly. "Do you know?"

Koga shook his head. "I have no information," he said shortly. "Except that more are due, of course. But when they will arrive——"

He shrugged his shoulders eloquently, as dismissing a subject not worthwhile pursuing.

Major Itsuki barked irritably at the men before him, and they doubled back into the trees again. He stood looking after them, and then up at the sky.

"Yes," he said, "and I suppose there is nothing to prevent a dozen more of them arriving tonight. It is all extremely inconvenient!"

Koga saluted. "Pardon, Major-*san*," he observed. "I do not see why. After all, there are only three of these others, and"—he smiled lopsidedly—"maybe a dozen natives. A few rounds from a gun—the sound will not carry in the jungle—and then the lake. I have it all prepared, honorable one."

Major Itsuki remained for a moment perfectly still, his face twisted into a peculiar little expression that might have been doubt, or distaste.

"They have been my friends—two of them," he said all at once. "It is a pity, Koga. Do you not feel that it is a pity?"

Lieutenant Koga drew himself up stiffly, as if somebody had given him a sudden jolt.

"I do not allow myself such feelings, Major-*san*," he murmured. "I am here to carry out orders. Yours, or," he added, as a mere breath, "another's."

There was a silence again. Itsuki spoke finally, in a grating voice, as if he had difficulty in controlling his words.

"You are threatening me, Koga?" he said. "With Tokyo, eh, and what they may say there. Very good, I shall not forget it; we shall discuss this later. Now go, and do as you have planned. When it is finished, report to me here."

He turned and walked quickly away into the shadow of the trees. Koga stood looking after him for an instant, and then whistled up another Japanese who had been busy inflating a rubber boat at the water's edge. The pair of them got into it, carrying a light machine gun apiece, and in a few moments they were out on the glassy surface, paddling quickly for the shore.

They had not traveled a quarter-mile when Koga stopped, listening. A dark, speculative look came over his face, and he muttered something under his breath. Back on the island, Itsuki was also tense, and bitter words came hissing from him as he waved the hidden men back into their retreat.

There was another plane up top there, invisible. They could hear it circling round, somewhere in the moonlight. Koga resumed his paddling for the shore, and Itsuki cursed in vain, shaking his fists at the sky.

The sound of the engine dwindled and died away—but something grew visible in the strange half-light. It was a mile or more away from Itsuki, but he knew what it was, all right, the silvery, drifting shape. So did Koga, paddling furiously for the shore.

VI

SO ALSO did the three tiger-hunters, on the jungle-trail above the lake.

Kappie stood with his hand cupped around his eyes, gazing at the apparition aloft there.

"Ja!" he said. "Well, so Ipoh was not seeing ghosts or devils after all. And we were right, Gevaerts, eh?"

The colonel was making remarks in a perfectly audible undertone—remarks that should have caused the waters in the placid lake to boil and birds to drop from the trees.

"The very-damned, yellow devils!" he concluded. "So that is the little business—parachute-troops, by God! Now, I wonder just how many of themselves they have set down among us thus."

"There's a couple of them there," said Spike, who had his binoculars. "They're dropping into the woods by the shore, looks like."

Gevaerts was peering down his long nose. "Hand me the glass," he said suddenly. "I am not sure—I believe I see something else, Mynheers."

THEY were on the crest of a little hill, looking down on the lake and its islands, as if into a basin. Colonel Gevaerts' eyes, like his hearing, were jungle-trained, and after a long stare through the glass he sniffed.

"On the island yonder, Mynheers," he said quietly. "There are folk there. I can see their footmarks on the beach—and something that looks much like a plane as well, drawn in under the trees. It is a nest we discover, gentlemen."

He handed the glass back to Spike and looked at Kappie. The Inspector was wrinkling up his nose with the expression of a man completely justified in his dealings.

"Aha!" he said. "And then, my friends? Where do we go from here, eh?"

Nobody appeared to have an answer to that one. They faced one another a trifle blankly, under the trees there on the jungle-path.

"It's dynamite," said Spike after a minute. "If Washington ever hears of this—"

Gevaerts exploded. "Washington!" he said. "If our old fellow across in Batavia gets wind of it, he will make a noise they hear in the moon. And then—"

"Then," said Kappie shortly, .there comes hell to these islands, that is all. So, we have to act, Mynheers—ourselves, and what we are to do is a puzzle, no?"

It seemed so to all three of them, looking down on Itsuki's lay-out below. But to Koga and his companion, moving swiftly through the reeds at the lake-edge, everything was very clear indeed.

As simple, in fact, as finding a party of tiger-hunters, loose here in the Ontong Padang jungle. Not much more difficult, in effect, than spotting a circus-parade coming down Broadway in the noon-hour.

Koga didn't know, exactly, where Kappie and his companions were. But they were somewhere around, here or hereabouts, and where the parachutists had dropped, there Kappie would be, pretty soon. That was the reasoning of Lieutenant Koga, who was then not a quarter-mile from the end of Kappie's eager, sniffing nose.

He turned over his shoulder, peering at the patch of undergrowth into which the parachutes had dropped.

"They will have to wait where they are," he said to his satellite. "We cannot attend to them now."

He had raised his voice a little, and away up the dim trail there the headman started. Gevaerts quit scratching his head, too, and glanced round.

"I thought—" he began, but the headman interrupted him, a skinny hand on his arm.

"Tuan," he whispered, "someone speaks."

Gevaerts nodded, and Kappie swung his rifle inquiringly downhill. Spike Murphy fiddled with his pistol, undecided whether to be excited or merely scared. And then the headman was gone, like a shadow—he and his retainers, flitting away into the moon-flecked green tangles. Kappie grunted.

"Itsuki," he said quietly. "They are

waiting for us down yonder. It was them in that first plane."

"I would not be surprised," said Gevaerts, tugging at his mustaches, "if you are not right. We had better be a little careful, I think. They may have notions, these clever scamps. It will not suit them to have us see what we have seen, to be sure."

He slipped into the dark patch of obscurity thrown by a big tree, and the others followed him. Lieutenant Koga, crawling flat on his belly, caught the movement and drew in his breath sharply, two hundred yards away.

It was too long a shot with the Brens, he figured—too long to be a certainty. He began to crawl, snake-wise on his belly, among the leaves.

Gevaerts said, "What do we wait for? I do not like it here, Kappie. It is an ambush."

"Doubtless." Kappie was frowning. "But do you not see, Colonel? If we leave matters as they are and return to Makassar, Itsuki will believe we are about to report this to Batavia. He will act—and the fat will be in the fire, as they say. Almighty, it would be war in twelve hours! We do not want that. Nor, I think, does Itsuki."

Gevaerts blinked at him. "I do not know what the devil you are talking about," he said irritably. "Only, this is no place to talk in. We get out of it, at once, do you hear?"

KAPPIE shrugged him off. He was standing with his arms folded and a peculiar tight-lipped smile on his leathery countenance. All at once he stepped out into the moonlight, in full view.

"Itsuki!" he called, in a thunderous bellow. "A moment—listen to me!"

Koga pushed the little gun in front of him, leveled it, and then relaxed with a little sigh of vexation. It occurred to him, forcibly, that a single target was not what he required in this private *blitzkrieg* of his. It would have to be a wipe-out, complete and thorough, to attain his ends. So, he waited, sucking in his lips and squinting, for Gevaerts and Spike Murphy to appear. And Kappie De Vries called Itsuki once more.

His voice, brazen as a foghorn, echoed among the placid surroundings of the lake, and Major Itsuki, on the island, grimaced a little as it came to him. He wanted, just then, no part of any interview with Makassar's Inspector of Police. What he desired to hear—with a certain unpleasant chill at the stomach—was the sudden, coughing roar of those murderous little guns up in the greenery across the way.

He listened anxiously for it, and Kappie took a few steps downhill, directly toward Koka, and Gevaerts cursed him under his breath for ninety-nine kinds of a much-ornamented fool, and Koga's finger twitched on the trigger, when all of them stopped their occupations, with various degress of astonishment written upon them. Yet again, from the far distance, and high up in the sky, there came the noise of engines.

Itsuki, on the island, spoke to the tough young officer who was senior among the parachutists.

"What is this?" he inquired. "They have been sending over more than one load at night? That was not the order."

The same thing had occurred to Koga, for he twisted round where he lay, so that he could stare aloft. "What is this?" he whispered to his companion.

And Kappie slipped hastily back under the trees to confer with Gevaerts. "Almighty!" he observed, "but this is an invasion!"

They waited, all of them, until the plane was circling overhead and the big, balloon affairs came drifting down the sky. They fell in the shallows, this time, close in to the island, and Itsuki, throwing concealment to the winds, ran splashing out to them.

"Wat drommel!" said Gevaerts under

the banyan-tree. "Something odd happens here."

"*Ja,*" said Kappie, staring. "Very odd, Mynheer colonel—very odd indeed."

They could see Itsuki dragging the parachutist clear of his equipment, and talking to him earnestly. Koga, in his lurking-place, suddenly made up his mind. He began to wriggle hastily forward, his eye on the banyan-tree, the gun thrust before him.

"Quick!" he called over his shoulder. "It is time—fire!"

Gevaerts had Kappie by the shoulder, and some sixth or seventh sense, plus his incredible hearing, galvanized him at that instant into action. He drove at the Inspector with all his weight, and the pair rolled together on the ground, as Koga pressed the trigger and the air filled with buzzing lead.

"Down!" Gevaerts howled. "This is bad, *goedverdom!*"

Another burst of nickel-jacketed visitors ripped through the leaves around them, and Kappie swore viciously.

"The devils!" he ejaculated. "They are trying to wipe us out. Are you there, Spike?"

Spike was flat on his face behind a tree. "I'm here," he said. "But you can certainly have it—this is going too far, a hell of a lot——"

He was interrupted by the bang of Gevaerts' express hunting rifle, and another inferno of bullets a foot overhead. Koga was firing high, but it would be only a question of time before he discovered that. Then it would be, said Spike Murphy gloomily, just too bad; he hadn't any illusions or delusions about what was going on here.

Calculated, fish-blooded murder, said Spike Murphy to himself as a bullet plucked his sleeve. And there didn't seem to be anything particular to be done about it. Not a thing—

Gevaerts and Kappie were holding a whispered council-of-war, their heads close together in a flowering bush. As always in the face of danger, Kappie had gone perfectly quiet and controlled, and Gevaerts' great nose was the only part of him that displayed any emotion whatever. It was snuffing trouble, a polished-walnut oriflamme.

"There are two of them," he observed. "An outflanking movement, Kappie—one to go, and one to stay here, as bait. I am the bait."

"No!" said Kappie instantly. "You are quicker than me. And one of us must get out of this. Go, now—*voetsack*, hurry! This very damned fellow will have both of us, all of us, in a moment."

Gevaerts went, moving on his belly like a gigantic angle-worm, and Spike watched Kappie De Vries, deliberately it seemed, trying to get himself riddled. Koga and his two guns were a scant sixty yards away; the thing was murder, beyond any arguing.

HE FOUND himself on his hands and knees, inexplicably. "Hey!" he heard somebody, himself, say creakily. "Get down there! They won't touch me."

And he was walking out into the middle of the path, his hands in the air, feeling completely ridiculous, and as if he were clothed strictly in an American flag the size of a postage stamp. From somewhere or other he heard Kappie De Vries, blasting at him intolerably, in four languages at once. He waited, in a kind of idiotic stupor, for the coughing chatter from that gun in front.

It did not come. Nothing came, not even a swift, decisive shot from Colonel Gevaerts, fifty yards to a flank. Nothing—and then, immediately and beyond credence, Spike Murphy was looking straight at Sergeant Jan.

The sergeant was down on the ground, doing something there. Something that occupied his great spade-paws, and made him grunt and sweat and heave—but he was still looking at Spike Murphy out of

his boiled-gooseberry, expressionless eyes. At Spike Murphy and beyond him, and Spike knew what he was looking for. Just as he knew what it was Sergeant Jan had underneath him there on the ground, limp and horrible and dead.

Kappie De Vries, behind him, in that instant, broke into a yell—the only time on record, it was said afterward by Gevaerts, that anybody had heard him yelp with sheer terror. The colonel made great play of that vocal reaction, it is true, but he was heard to confess that maybe, after all, Kappie was excusable. Because he had suddenly found himself face to face with the one party on earth he hadn't figured upon meeting just there.

His wife advanced upon him out of the trees. She was, as Colonel Gevaerts avers, looking like something out of the pit, and she carried a pistol in her hand.

"Well, Mynheer," the colonel heard her say acidly, "I told you, did I not, these *vervloekt* fellows would have something waiting for you?"

VII

KAPPIE DE VRIES stood on the shore of the little lake, scratching his head.

"*Ja,*" he exclaimed, "that is all very well, but still I do not see how you—— Jan, in God's name, tell me true! Did you and Micaela—my wife—descend in these crazy parachutes? I cannot believe it."

Jan saluted. He was as near chuckling as he had ever been in his life, the chuckle of one who has successfully put something over.

But it was Micaela that spoke.

"To be sure we jumped," she said. "I would do it again, too. There is nothing in it."

Kappie rolled his eyes helplessly. "No, I suppose not," he said with ponderous irony. "Well, you know what you have done, I take it—we should have been *alle verloren,* the three of us, if it had not been for Jan here. Not so, Gevaerts?"

The colonel nodded. He had been remarkably quiet in these last minutes—almost sheepish—and he seemed to find it difficult to look at Micaela or Jan. Spike thought it would be some time before he recovered from the shock of their appearance. He was saved from the necessity of making a direct answer, however, by the plash of paddles, and one of the rubber boats, of which there seemed to be plenty on hand, came ashore. It contained Major Itsuki—very much put out and pale about the gills.

"This is a terrible affair, gentlemen," he began. "A dreadful mistake."

He saw the expression on Kappie's iron mug, and on the colonel's as well, and stopped, looking unbelievably foolish. Kappie was recovering himself by now, and there was plenty of the old truculence in his manner.

"A mistake, *ja,*" he said. "A number of mistakes, in fact, Itsuki. You are about to have a pleasant time explaining them, I believe—to my government in Batavia, and also," he cocked an eye at Spike, to others. Not so, Itsuki?"

The major swallowed, as if he had been about to say something but had bitten it off in a hurry. "Yes, that is so," he said finally. "It is very difficult—"

"Difficult!" Kappie snorted. "I should say impossible, my friend, and be done with it. How many, for instance, of these so-precious boys of yours have you already dropped here—without our knowledge, Mynheer? A very pretty tale to get around, is it not?"

"It must not—get around," said Itsuki. "There would be a war, and we—we do not want war, either of us."

"And therefore," Kappie cooed, "you drop parachutists into the middle of us at night. What are these gentlemen of yours—tourists?"

Itsuki shook his head. He was being baited and not enjoying the experience.

"Can we not—could we not come to some arrangement, between us?" he suggested, and Kappie blinked.

"Arrangement?" he queried. "You mean—say nothing of all this—what was it—mistake? But what of these—tourists of yours? They are here, are they not?"

Itsuki fidgeted. "That could be remedied," he said. "I presume that is what you—desire?"

Kappie De Vries glanced at Colonel Gevaerts. "Do we desire it, Mynheer?" he inquired, in a voice that shook a trifle, and the colonel affected to consider, fondling his nose.

"I think," he remarked delicately, "that it would be as well."

Kappie turned again to Itsuki. "Very good," he said. "You, I suppose, can see to it that these—tourists are returned home, without too much fuss?"

"There will be no fuss," Itsuki said. "No fuss whatever. I am glad, Inspector-*san*, that you are so reasonable. This has been unfortunate for everyone."

Kappie's hard-boiled eye sought the path, along whose border lay what Jan had left of Koga and his companion.

"*Ja*, very unfortunate," he agreed. "A bad business, Itsuki. And now," he continued cheerfully, "I am wondering what is next.

"How about the tiger-hunt? It seems a pity, now that we are all here, not to continue with that."

HE GRINNED cheerfully at the Japanese, but the grin did not last for very long. Micaela had been sitting on a stone, listening, and now she arose slowly, as if with a purpose. She began speaking, and continued until she had quite done with the subject of tiger-hunts, and none of the men present had ever heard anything like it. Itsuki gasped and the colonel affected to be watching the dawn and Jan turned away; it was only Spike Murphy who managed to preserve his composure at all.

He took Kappie by the arm. "This way, fellow," he said, and led him back uphill, toward the village and the car. "This way—hustle!"

He fairly dragged Kappie away from there, and Micaela followed, her lovely face still distorted with fury, the breath coming short through her nose. Gevaerts and Itsuki looked on, wordless, until the little procession was out of sight. Then they shrugged their shoulders; there were some things incomprehensible, even to their disciplined, soldierly minds.

They didn't understand Inspector De Vries and his establishment at all.

Adventurers All

Hung by a Belt

IT HAPPENED the night I received orders to return to the main post at Fort Wright, N. Y., from the small island where I had been doing special duty with Battery K of the 11th Coast Artillery.

It was mid-winter and a howling Northwester made the night unfit for either man or beast to be out in, but orders were orders! So, with my head bent to the fury of the driving snow and my face buried deep in my great army coat until my cap rested on its collar edge, I blindly staggered down the mile road that led to the dock, mildly cussing at being pulled out of my nice warm quarters.

The dock was all in darkness when I reached it. The dockmaster had not as yet arrived. Darn it! He only had to be here twice a week, which was all the government boat ever landed in the winter. Why couldn't he be on time on a night like this?

To keep from freezing I started walking up and down the deserted dock. It was an old rambling affair and at one end they were repairing it. Back and forth I went, all unconscious of the fact that at each turn I came a few steps nearer the place where they were putting in the new planks.

Still cussing and thinking of the boys back at the Barracks, I was suddenly brought to concerning my impending danger when a plank sank under my feet. Down I went, amid a shower of ice and snow; but not far, for I was brought to a halt with a jerk that nearly snapped my head off. My heavy army belt had caught on a spike. I started to wiggle and twist, but to no avail. I was hung up and hung fast with nothing left to do but cut the belt which held me. Desperately I felt for my jackknife. The knife wasn't in any of my pockets. Then it came to me that I had been using it that morning, and it was in my other clothes.

Here was a pretty how do you do! I was hung up like a quarter of beef in a market and with as good a chance of getting off without the help of someone. I stopped trying to get loose and called for help. I might just as well have saved my breath, for there wasn't anyone within a mile and wouldn't be until the dockmaster arrived.

I WAS wondering just how long I could stand the icy water, when I was confronted with a new peril. It made me shudder as if the fingers of death had already clutched my heart. The tide was rising! If I didn't freeze to death before anyone found me, I'd drown.

If I could only get a grip on the pile, there might be a fighting chance of clearing my belt, but the pile, covered with ice and as slippery as if it had been greased, was a poor thing to get a hold on. I soon found out it was no go.

My frantic struggle only made me sink lower into the water, which was now up to my shoulders. Even though half frozen, the sweat was standing out on my forehead in great beads. Everything I had ever done

flashed through my mind. My whole life passed before me, things I had long forgotten. Though I knew it was useless, I again called for help, my voice echoing under the dock loud enough to waken the dead, so it seemed.

There was no response.

With a sob I frantically tore away at my belt, but my weight was too much and my fingers so numb that I could not even budge it. I tried drawing in my stomach only to find this made me slip lower into the water, bringing it now up to my chin.

In one last desperate effort I reached my hand back of me so as to grasp the spike and see if I could raise myself enough to slip the belt off. Joy, my hand got a firm hold! Slowly, but surely, I raised myself and felt the belt loosen. A little more and I could slip it off! Boy, why hadn't I thought of this at first? But I crowed too soon, for my hand slipped off the spike. My palm was cut open as it raked over the spike although at the time I did not know it, for my hand was so numb from the cold.

As I fetched up my head was submerged. I kicked and spluttered and thought I would never be able again to raise my head above the water. But I did and came up spluttering and gasping, to find a bright light shining in my eyes. It was my boat just coming into the dock.

Gathering all my strength and filling my tortured lungs with air, I gave one last despairing cry. That was all I knew until coming to in the hospital at the Post.

The dockmaster had seen my tracks in the snow and was looking for me and heard my last call for help. With the help of one of the boys who had come down with him, they got me just in time, for the water that would have been washed up from the incoming boat would have finished me.

If I live to be a hundred, I will never forget those moments under the dock. It will always be fresh in my mind!

Tex Register.

A Ride With Terror

I WAS telegraph operator at Declez, California, during the time the great breakwater was being built at San Pedro. Rock for this was quarried from the deposits of granite at Declezville, four miles below Declez.

Working full blast, the quarry employed three hundred men, most of whom were Mexicans.

East of Declez Station was a long track upon which the railroad stored flat cars for rock hauling and it was an established habit for us telegraph operators at Declez to cut off one of these flat cars and ride it down the steep grade to the quarry where the saloon or cantina furnished means to wash the cobwebs from our parched throats.

One hot day in July, feeling the urge for alcoholic cheer, I waited until the local

had switched the last cut of rock from the quarry then hied myself to the empty cars on the siding and cut one off. As it rolled out onto the main branch line for the quarry I tried the brakes with my brake stick and finding that they worked in fine shape perched myself upon the brake wheel on the front end of the car and got ready to enjoy a speedy and rough ride to the cool interior of the cantina.

The flat car ran about fifteen rail lengths and gained speed quickly. I looked ahead at a figure running out of the greasewood alongside the track. He was ragged and wild looking. Hatless and with his dirty shirt torn to shreds. He ran into the center of the track and waved his arms wildly. I grabbed the brakewheel and twisted it up as rapidly as possible making all human effort to stop before I ran the man down. I saw that I couldn't stop in time and yelled for him to get out of the way. Just as the car seemed about to knock him down he jumped to one side and grabbed the hand irons to which he hung as the car dragged him alongside. I pulled him to safety after a few minutes of effort and started giving him a cussing out for being such a fool. He lay there on the deck and glared at me and then it was that I noticed something wrong with his eyes. They were the eyes of one insane or drugged. The car, free from braking pressure was now bowling along at thirty miles an hour and rapidly gaining speed. Unless the brakes were applied, to hold it in control, it would soon be running so fast that hand brakes would not stop it in time to keep it from crashing into the granite mountain at the end of the track.

I started for the brake wheel, maintaining a precarious balance with difficulty, as the car was bouncing and swinging, threatening to leave the rails which had not been lined or ballasted for such high speed.

I reached the brake wheel and engaged the dog to hold what slack I could take out of the chain. I started winding it up. Some sudden warning caused me to turn quickly. My Mexican passenger, a long knife in hand, was advancing, holding his balance with difficulty. He reached for me with clutching hand and gave vent to a strange weird blood curdling yell. There was murder in those strange looking eyes and then the truth of what was wrong with the man came to me with terrible force . . . "reefers" . . . the cigarettes made from the weed called Marijuana. I had heard rumors of the soul destroying drug being used by the Mexicans at the quarry, but had been under the belief that all found using it had been turned over to the County authorities. This man, Gonzales, had evidently been overlooked or had escaped the list of addicts known.

THERE was only one thing for me to do, and I must do it quickly. I swung at the crazed man with my brake stick and missed and to make matters worse my hands were slick with sweat and the stick slipped and flew out into the greasewood. Gonzales gave another inhuman cry and staggered closer and I closed in on him and grabbed his knife arm. Marijuana lends super-strength to its victims and I found myself in a terrific and uneven struggle for life as soon as I touched him. The car gave a sudden lurch. I lost my footing and found myself flat on my back, half my body over the side of the crazily swinging car while Gonzales held my throat in a death grip and wrested his knife hand free from my frenzied grip as easily as if I had been a baby. The knife poised high above me and I closed my eyes and waited for the shock of cold steel. By this time the flat car was traveling at a dangerous speed with violent jarring and bouncing as the wheels hit the uneven joints. Something flashed past my overhanging head and I heard screaming. I sensed that it must have been the water tank we had passed and that meant that we were halfway down the hill with two miles to go before we crashed. The screams must have come from the car maintainer's wife who

lived at the tank station and who was witnessing the life and death struggle on that flat car.

I opened my eyes. Gonzales was bending over me. He still had that painful grip on my throat, the knife was being lowered slowly and the point pressed against my throat. I felt the sharp point pressing deeper and closed my eyes again. This was the end. Suddenly I felt myself jerked loose from the car and flying out into space. Then came oblivion.

It was twenty-four hours later when I woke up in the railroad hospital.

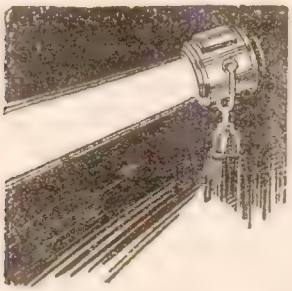
As soon as I was allowed to talk I learned that the flat car had jumped the track a mile below the water tank. I had three broken ribs and a crushed shoulder, but I was alive even if my face did resemble a crazy work quilt. Poor drugged Gonzales had been killed instantly when he fell under the rolling car and was crushed. When I was discharged from the hospital I started looking for another telegraph job because I was also discharged from the railroad for taking the flat car from the siding.

Rex Hall

$15 For True Adventures

UNDER the heading Adventurers All, *the editors of SHORT STORIES will print a new true adventure in every issue of the magazine. Some of them will be written by well known authors, and others by authors for the first time. Any reader of the magazine, any where, may submit one of these true adventures, and for every one accepted the author will be paid $15. It must be written in the first person, must be true, and must be exciting. Do not write more than 1000 words; be sure to type your manuscript on one side of the paper only; and address it to: "Adventurers All," Care of Editors of SHORT STORIES, Inc., 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y. Manuscripts which are not accepted will not be returned unless accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope for that purpose.*

The Story Tellers' Circle



Wings Over the Caribbean

LONG time we no see William Byron Mowery in SHORT STORIES—not indeed since the time of his Northern novelettes—such as *Rifle Talk, Heap Big Smoke,* etc. Since those days his name has been on such book and movie successes as *The Silver Hawk, The Girl from God's Mercie, Heart of the North*—to mention only a few. In a recent letter Mr. Mowery said that of recent years after prowling around the Caribbean and seeing the scads of stories there yelling to be written, he had given over the Canadian North and taken up with the lands of hurricanes, politicos, jungles and feverish Latinity to our south.

In this connection he says of his story in this issue—*Dark Wings*—that it has more solid facts behind it than may be apparent, for the amount of alien running along the coast is amazing, and the officials have been rather apathetic about it. About the story itself he writes that N'longo is a made name. It is roughly similar to Natal fever, he says and that an unknown fever, thought possibly to be a virulent form of the Natal, has recently appeared in the lower Antilles. In the story the author uses "patrol" in the sense of the interlocking work being carried on by the Coast Guard, Immigration, FBI., Carribbean "secret squad," Federal Health, etc. In the past year alien running in the Gulf area is estimated to have trebled, and has changed from Chinese and Mediterranean types to that indicated in Mr. Mowery's story.

Back from Hell

OVER a period of years Major Charles Gilson has had numerous stories in SHORT STORIES—the latest of which was *The Old Buddha's Bed* in our last issue. Long a resident of France, Major Gilson said in a recent letter that his escape from that war torn country after the German occupation, was an adventure story in itself. We quote from his letter herewith:

Many times in my life have I been in grave danger, often have I been half starved, and I have roughed it in circumstances when there were no facilities for sleep, washing or changing one's clothes —but never have I had all these together in the company of some hundreds of women and children.

It was also the only opportunity I have yet had of seeing my own countrywomen (not men) in expectation of immediate and certain death, and I can assure you their pale resolved calmness was indeed something to admire.

Rushed on a collier, black with coal dust from stem to stern, with no more baggage than such as each could carry, we got out of France with an escorted convoy. But on the Spanish frontier our engines broke down and we were left—a lame duck at the mercy of any Italian submarine that sighted us, for we could do no more than about two knots until the engines were repaired. Then a moonlit night —when we were between the Spanish coast and the Balaerics (where I once lived you'll remember)—the attack I had expected came at one o'clock at night. We had 840 people crowding the holds and deck of whom more than three-fourths were old people, women and kids. Our boats were unseaworthy, and there were no rafts, life jackets or buoys. It was

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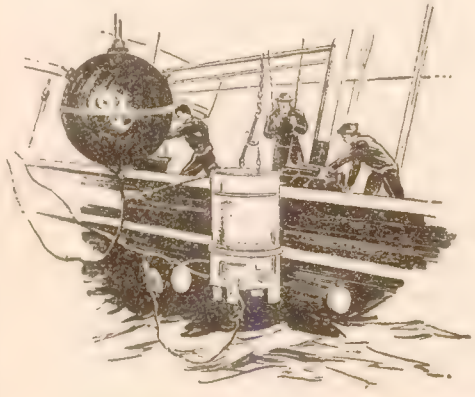

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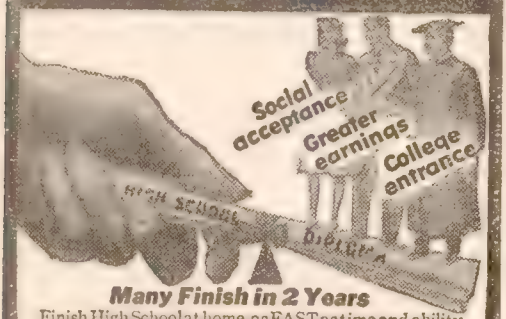

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just cold-blooded attempted murder. We fought them with our one 2-inch Q F gun, maneuvering behind a smoke screen. One torpedo passed clear under our keel amidships and the other just missed the screw. Had either hit us 700 lives must have been lost. We gave them about seven or eight shots, all of which were near the mark, before she disappeared or gave it up. There's just an off chance we may have hit her.

Half starved, with no more than four ounces of water per day, besmeared with coal dust scrubbed into the skin with sea water, we reached Gib in safety and thence were escorted to Liverpool.

Charles Gilson

THE ENDS OF THE EARTH CLUB

HERE is a free and easy meeting place for the brotherhood of adventurers. To be one of us, all you have to do is register your name and address with the Secretary, Ends-of-the-Earth Club, c/o Short Stories, Inc., 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y. Your handsome membership - identification card will be sent you at once. There are no dues—no obligations.

A reader, through curiosity

Dear Secretary:

Several years ago SHORT STORIES, to me, was just a magazine that my father read, and that held no interest for me. But one day, having nothing else to do, I read one. From that day on I have been a loyal reader and will continue to be as long as SHORT STORIES is published.

I hope you will accept my application for membership in your Ends of the Earth Club. I am seventeen, five feet three, and have blue eyes and blond hair. I'm interested in art (hope to make a career of it),

like most all sports and hope some day to travel extensively.

I'd like to hear from and exchange photos with people who have spent some time in, or who live in tropical countries.

Hoping to weigh the postman down, I am

Sincerely yours,

I. Mahone

2111 Pensacola Ave.,
Chicago, Illinois.

A plea from Haiti

Dear Secretary:

Please enter my name as a member of the Ends of the Earth Club.

I would like to correspond with members interested in English and French literature. As for me, I am not only interested in literature, but also in study of American law, and in economics as applied to agriculture.

Many thanks and very truly yours,

Franck Ambroise
Agronomist-Lawyer.

Cap-Haitien, Haiti.

Paging Philatelists

Dear Secretary:

Would you please enroll me as a member of your fine club? I have been reading SHORT STORIES for about five years and think that it's the best magazine published.

My chief interest is stamp collecting. I would appreciate hearing from members outside of the U. S. who are interested in this hobby. I will try to answer all letters and am willing to trade the latest issues of the U. S. for the latest issues of the foreign countries.

Thanking you for your kindness and hoping to hear from one and all. I remain,

Sincerely,

Charles Cahan

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29x4.75-20	2.50	1.25
29x5.00-19	2.85	1.25
30x5.00-20	2.85	1.25
5.25-17	2.90	1.35
28x5.25-19	2.90	1.35
29x5.25-19	2.95	1.35
30x5.25-20	2.95	1.35
31x5.25-21	3.25	1.35
5.50-17	3.35	1.40
28x5.50-19	3.35	1.40
29x5.50-19	3.35	1.45
6.00-17	3.40	1.40
30x6.00-18	3.40	1.40
31x6.00-19	3.40	1.45
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ENDS OF THE EARTH CLUB MEMBERS

WITH hundreds of letters from new members coming in every day, it is obviously impossible to print all of them in the columns of the magazine. The editors do the best they can, but naturally most readers buy SHORT STORIES *because of the fiction that it contains. Below are more names and addresses of Ends of the Earth Club members. Most of these members will be eager to hear from you, should you care to correspond with them, and will be glad to reply. Note these lists, if you are interested in writing to other members. Names and addresses will appear only once.*

Ramonu Abibu, 18 Ajishomo St., Lagos, Nigeria, W. Africa
A. G. Ariyoh, 35 Portonov Market St., Lagos, Nigeria, W. Africa
B. Beaufort, Pooler, Georgia
V. Beaufort, Pooler, Georgia
Edward Bender, 44 Kilmer Rd., Larchmont, N. Y.
John Bosinec, 315 West 7th Ave., Tarentum, Pa.
Dick Bradford, CCC Co. 736, S C S 9, Tremonton, Utah
Thomas Bresnihar, 76 Barry St., North Dorchester, Mass.
Helene Brown, 216 B, Route 2, Ojai, Calif.
Helio Capella, Caixa Postal 453, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
Sol Casale, Mt. Kipp, Glen Gardner, N. J.
P. Clinton, Fabrica do Gaz, Caixa Postal 571, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
Willian F. Coleman, 89 Dagmar St., Winnipeg, Man., Canada
Franklin Conner, R R 4, Auburn, Indiana
M. V. Correa, Casilla 61, Santa Cruz, Brazil
Leon Creadieur, 524 West 9th St., Crowley, La.
Harrison Cunningham, Box 135, Hallowell, Maine
James De Rossitte, General Del., Little Rock, Arkansas
Robert E. Doherty, 90 Grove St., Fall River, Mass.
Royston K. Ekogu, Central School, Ekowe, c/o U. A. C. Ltd., Ekowe, Nigeria, W. Africa
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S. C. Fallis, Jr., Spur, Box 283, Texas
Howard Foster, 3480 Third Ave., New York, N. Y.
Imre Frank Jr., 7229 Prairie Ave., Chicago, Ill.
Walter Freeman, Rutherford Place, Montvale, N. J.
James F. Gallagher, Back River Road, Dover, New Hampshire
Bill Gilland, 4018 Pershing Dr., El Paso, Texas
E. E. Gillies Hanson, 1, Thompson Lane, Rae-Town, Kingston, Jamaica, B. W. I.
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